

THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

choice

APRIL 2011 • WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU



Store wars

We asked you to tell us your favourite stores, and some of the results will surprise you



Up to standard?

The way we wash our clothes has changed – so why hasn't the Australian standard?

Lab tests

Fridges
Washing machines
Digital cameras
Mini hi-fis
Gas cooktops
Car & bike GPS
Digital radios

Lights! Camera! ACTION!

Join us on the red carpet
for the CHOICE Awards 2011

Best low-fee bank account
Best retailer
Best TV brand
Best value mobile phone service

AND MUCH MUCH MORE!

PLUS

Top book buys

Online vs bricks-and-mortar shops

Aldi's price promise broken

"My used car nightmare"

Make sure you don't get
caught too



269
PRODUCTS
RATED!

HOT CROSS BUNS – which ones taste best?

COMMENT

The award goes to...

The winners of our Consumer Champion Award represent the CHOICE spirit of savvy and active consumers



I really hope you enjoy this bumper issue of *CHOICE*, with its focus on the second annual CHOICE Awards. An enormous amount of work goes into our awards issue, and I'm thrilled that our members get real value from the categories we choose for awards. You will also see plenty of media coverage

around the awards, which I hope sends a strong message to finalists that they are doing the right thing, and to others that it's time to up their game.

It's great to see innovation in the mobile phone space, and one of the big four banks deservedly earning praise for some of the products they provide. This year, we have two winners for the Consumer Champion Award – one for lifetime achievement, the other for a recent action that has made a real difference to telco customers. Our champions represent the CHOICE spirit of savvy and active consumers, and their work encourages others to stand up for their rights too. Our CHOICE Awards section begins on page 19.

CHOICE has a proud tradition of speaking without fear or favour, and we work hard to make sure we get the balance right. When things are good we say so, and when they're bad we don't let up until they are changed for the better. That's why we have the equally compelling and high-profile Shonkys, representing the flip side of the CHOICE Awards for consumers in Australia.

A few weeks ago, the CHOICE Better Banking Campaign team took the people's voice to Canberra to launch a report that we expect will bring significant change to this sector. The *Better Banking* report outlines much-needed solutions tackling banking culture, competition and corporate responsibility. For a full copy of our report, visit www.choice.com.au/betterbanking.

The really exciting thing is that I believe we are getting somewhere – there are signs of real change in the banking sector. The cosy relationship between the big four is looking strained and more people are choosing mutuals. Ultimately, consumers like you can take the credit for these changes, by choosing how and who to bank with. More than 50,000 people came to our Compare, Ditch and Switch website (betterbanking.choice.com.au/ditch-and-switch) in the few days following its launch. As banks compete to attract and retain customers, there will be long-overdue change in this sector.

I hope you enjoy our extensive coverage of the Oscars of Australian consumerism, and a big thank you to those who are helping our Better Banking Campaign. It is the marriage of great CHOICE information, advice, support, high-profile campaigns and events with the power of your decisions and actions that makes CHOICE and its members a force to be reckoned with.

Nick Stace, CEO
Phone 1800 266 786

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so we remain all 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry.

We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, www.choice.com.au and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers.

CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

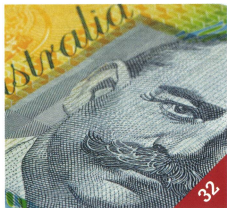
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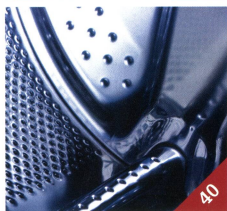
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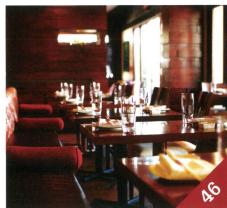
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+ FOOD

MILK PRICE WAR TURNS SOUR The Australian Senate has announced an inquiry into the milk price war raging between the biggest supermarket chains.

The price war started when Coles dropped the price of milk to \$1 a litre in January. Other chains have followed suit, causing uproar over anti-competitive behaviour and its impact on dairy farmers. Coles has hit back, saying it hasn't reduced the price paid to its milk processors. But not everyone is convinced, with industry body Australian Dairy Farmers campaigning for Wesfarmers (which owns Coles) to explain the price cuts.

CHOICE believes the backlash relates to broader issues around competition in Australia's grocery sector, and has made a submission to the inquiry questioning whether the \$1 per litre discounts are a sign of genuine and healthy competition.

In our view, consumers don't win if heavy discounting in the short term reduces product choice or undermines quality in the medium or long term.

EMILY MCCLUSKEY

+ BREAKING NEWS

Tweed scam derailed

Never accept an unsolicited offer to offload your investment shares. That lesson was recently brought home – again – when a judge prevented long-time bottom-feeder David Tweed from the closing the deal on Perpetual investments bought well below their value from unsuspecting investors. This had become a classic Tweed manoeuvre, until a recent change in law limited access to share registries. This rise started before that change. Let's hope the ruling sticks. **ANDY KOLLMORGEN**

Slimmed out

The Latin Seed slimming product is marketed as being 100% Brazilian candle nut, but testing has revealed it contains poisonous seeds of the yellow oleander (also known as lucky nut), which can cause symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea, dizziness and heart damage. It's been recalled from sale, but if you already have some, stop using it immediately and return to place of purchase or dispose of it safely out of the reach of children. Watch out for our story on herbal weight loss supplements in May.

KARINA BRAY

Telco troubles

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman says that complaints have increased by almost 9% over the last six months of 2010, with mobile service complaints up by more than 20%. Not surprisingly, Vodafone customers seem to be especially hard done by, with complaints about that telco up by 96%!

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

+ SUPERMARKETS

Aldi's broken promises

The supermarket isn't playing fair with uniform pricing.

In 2008, Aldi was the first supermarket to introduce uniform pricing across its Australian stores. But despite promising that "from Rosehill to Rutherford, Bundaberg to Ballarat, you'll pay the same low prices on groceries in every Aldi", CHOICE has found discrepancies in sale item prices.

Aldi's policy states that uniform pricing exists for all groceries, excluding fresh fruit, vegetables and regional bakery lines. But no mention is made of special buys, which can range from televisions to clothing. When CHOICE visited several stores, discounts on special buys varied widely, with prices higher in some areas. Full-priced items in Warringham, NSW, were half off in Maroubra Junction, NSW. Items that were reduced in Marrickville, NSW, were not discounted in Maroubra Junction, NSW.

An Aldi spokesperson told CHOICE that special buys were exempt from the national pricing policy. "The policy refers to groceries, and special buys are not part of the

grocery range. That has been the case since the introduction of the policy in 2008. But we're happy to hear feedback if people are confused – they can contact our head directly on (02) 9675 9000."

CHOICE believes that since Aldi identifies itself as a grocery retailer, consumers may not differentiate between grocery items and special buys. Their policies must specify all exclusions to avoid misleading consumers. If you've had issues with any other retailer's broken promises, email us at investigation@choice.com.au.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



CHOICE believes that since Aldi identifies as a grocery retailer, consumers may not differentiate between grocery items and special buys



**CHOICE
ONLINE**

Visit www.choice.com.au/milktest for the results of our milk taste test.

+ TELCOS

Telstra rip-off

In a blow to consumers, Telstra has changed its mobile cap plan pricing structure to bill in 60-second increments. From 20 March 2011, calls will be rounded up to the nearest minute, meaning customers will pay the same amount for a one minute and one second call as for a one minute and 59 second call.

In the terms and conditions signed by customers, a clause allows Telstra to change the way they bill customers. Relying on this clause, the telco's call centre staff claim they are charging differently, not more. A spokesperson explained that the move was intended to "simplify charging across our plans. It also brings us into line with competitors charging in 60-second increments for mobile calls."

But many customers who may have signed up with Telstra because of its previous billing policies are now stuck in contracts. While Telstra claims the actual impact on customers will be minimal, a poll conducted by CHOICE Online, which found more than 50% of members said they sometimes or always went over their cap limits, suggests otherwise.

"I signed up with Telstra because even though they had a lower cap limit than their competitors, I knew that at the end of the day I was paying in 30-second increments, which was likely to actually cost me less," says Joseph Canaris, an irate customer. "Now I'm stuck."

CHOICE is currently drafting a letter of complaint to the ACCC.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

+ SUSTAINABILITY

Can't see the Eco-Wood for the trees

CHOICE has caught Freedom greenwashing.

CHOICE has scored a victory in the war against shonky environmental claims, with furniture chain Freedom deciding to review its Eco-Wood and Eco Shutter products.

Following a member tip-off, CHOICE contacted Freedom for more information about their Eco-Wood range of ready-made blinds, which are in fact not made of wood at all, nor do they appear to have any environmentally sustainable qualities.

The product label describes Eco Shutter as a "durable 'faux' material", while the Eco-Wood packaging says it "looks and feels like real wood", and is "made from fire-retardant materials". These materials are identified as "sawdust PVC and stabiliser".

In response, Freedom conceded that "having reviewed the products in this Eco-Wood range, we can see a possible unintended interpretation by a customer, and we are now in the process of updating and replacing

those labels and promotional materials where necessary."

While Freedom were quick to respond to CHOICE's query, that does not change the fact Eco-Wood products have been on sale for several years, so CHOICE has forwarded the issue to the ACCC for follow-up. We will watch carefully to see if Freedom's review results in a more accurate name for this less-than-fantastic plastic.

MATT LEVEY



+ TRANSACTION FEES

NEW EFTPOS STRATEGY EFTPOS Payments Australia Limited (EPAL) has made a move to "take on the international debit schemes" by introducing a new five-cent interchange fee for transactions above \$15, EPAL Managing Director, Bruce Mansfield, told CHOICE in a meeting last month.

The fee will go from the merchant's bank to the cardholder's bank and is not a charge to consumers, but some believe it will end up raising the price of goods. Jost Stollman, CEO of rival debit card provider, Tyro, said merchants will now "have to decide whether they absorb the cost increase, raise prices, surcharge EFTPOS transactions or limit EFTPOS acceptance".

EPAL says the zero fee for transactions under \$15 is "an incentive for more retailers to accept small payments on EFTPOS, something consumers have long wanted".

Five cents is less than half of what multinational debit card providers such as Mastercard and Visa charge (about 12c on average), which means banks still receive a bigger cut from those transactions. But that may no longer be a worry. In 2009, EFTPOS entered a partnership that includes the big four banks and major retailers to form EPAL. The new income stream will be used to add features such as chip technology and online and mobile capability.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

WHOOOPS!

- A production error in our February issue saw the pics of the Electrolux Ultra One and LG Compressor vacuums swapped on page 50-51.
- We'd also like to apologise for an error in our March issue story on solar power systems (page 37). The photo in that story was of a solar hot water system, not a solar PV system.

Even though sterol-enriched products are effective at helping to control cholesterol levels, high blood cholesterol should be managed under medical supervision

+ FOOD

Cheese, please

New cholesterol-lowering cheese products are available.

If you suffer from high cholesterol, you may have come across foods with added plant sterols, which have been shown to help reduce blood cholesterol levels by up to 10%. They work with cholesterol-lowering drugs, but they're not meant to replace your medication.

To date, most of these products are spreads. However, the amount needed to give you the recommended serve of plant sterol adds fat and kilojoules to the diet, which you may wish to avoid if you're trying to control your weight.

Another product is Pura/Dairy Farmers HeartActive milk, which provides the recommended level of sterols in two to three 250mL serves per day.

Kraft has recently introduced two reduced-fat cheese products that contain plant sterols: Liveactive slices and cream cheese. Given that cheese is one of the main things people with high cholesterol cut down on, this may be a godsend to those who miss it. Two serves give the recommended amount of sterols, and you can also benefit from the protein and calcium content.

However, they're a lot more expensive than similar products.

Even though sterol-enriched products are effective at helping to control cholesterol levels, high blood cholesterol should be managed under medical supervision. Make sure you always tell your doctor if you're eating any products with added plant sterols.

KARINA BRAY



+ ELECTRICITY PRICES

Power up, consumers shocked

Electricity bills are on the increase around Australia, no matter what the outcome of the latest political wrangle about pricing carbon.

Retail electricity prices have increased an average of 30% between 2006 and 2010, returning to the same levels they were at in the mid-1980s, and are set to keep increasing in most states.

In Queensland, prices are set to rise by 13% over the three years from 1 July 2010, while prices in WA and Victoria are heading upwards as well.

According to one recent estimate, a NSW Energy Australia customer with an annual electricity bill of

\$1250 in 2009-10 would see that rise to almost \$1700 over three years. Both major parties were quick to promise generous power bill rebates at the recent NSW state election.

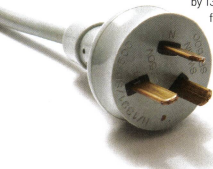
The main reason for these increases is the huge cost of replacing and expanding our electricity supply networks, as ageing infrastructure struggles to deal with increased demand for energy. Costs are estimated at about \$51 billion over the next five years alone, and consumers are already paying for this through higher bills.

Another factor is the introduction of a carbon price, assuming federal parliament can agree on a scheme.

Depending on the final details, this could add about \$300 a year to the average power bill. The Gillard government has promised to compensate households for electricity price rises from a carbon scheme, with the possibility many consumers will actually be better off as a result. A carbon price will also provide much-needed certainty for the energy sector, helping limit costs in the future.

CHOICE will be campaigning hard this year to ensure households do not carry the burden for the big polluters under a carbon price, and for genuine action on energy efficiency to drive down bills.

MATT LEVEY



+ GROUP-BUYING WEBSITES

Case of the missing macarons

Online group-buying giant Groupon has entered the Australian daily deal market in a puff of smoke and mirrors.



Internet users are subject to many different forms of advertising, some more questionable than others. However, you could surely be forgiven for clicking on the ad pictured above, believing you were in for a cheap and tasty treat. After all, the ad even names the city you can expect to find the sweets in the tempting quantity of "all you can eat".

But click as you might, you'll find no macarons for sale on Groupon's website, StarDeals.com.au, and certainly not in such a generous

quantity. According to industry commentator Dealaday.com.au, the company has admitted the deal was a ruse – merely an example of what customers might expect to find.

And it doesn't end there. CHOICE uncovered another fake deal – eBook readers at a promised discount of 70%. After committing your personal details to the site you're offered a daily deal, but there are no eBook readers in sight.

In addition to disappointing bargain hunters, there is a more serious note for sellers (both bricks-and-mortar and online) who advertise products that don't exist in the hope of gaining residual sales (often referred to as "bait and switch"). Businesses are required by law to provide reasonable quantities of goods they have advertised.

CHOICE is concerned about the transparency of online advertising for daily deals, and urges members to take care when considering offers. One solution is to look for companies willing

to offer further buyer protection, such as group-buying website JumpOnIt.com.au. "We offer a no questions asked, money-back guarantee for 30 days on unused coupons," says CEO Colin Fabig. "We also have a live chat service, which means you can ask questions before you purchase."

If you're unhappy about something you've bought, contact your state or territory's consumer affairs body.

BRENDAN MAYS



CHOICE ONLINE POLL

Do you use daily deal websites?

Yes

40%

I don't know what they are

35%

No

24%

YOUR SAY: GROUP-BUYING WEBSITES

The power of group-buying websites can deliver big discounts for consumers. They can also offer some exciting experiences that you might otherwise never consider, and there's no question they have plenty of fans. However, when you're the 700th person buying a deal from a small business, such as a hair salon, it's not surprising that there might be some issues such as longer-than-expected waiting times. Here are a few interesting anecdotes CHOICE has heard:

- **Cruise that never sails** After buying a voucher for a relaxing cruise, one would-be sailor never

had the chance to stretch her sea legs when the cruise company repeatedly cancelled cruises due to being under-booked. After several attempts, the idea of a pleasant cruise sailed away and a refund was deemed a better option.

- **Not exactly Rapunzel** One CHOICE staff member was shocked when she was told – with plenty of attitude to boot – that her hair was too long to colour without an additional payment. No chance of repeat business there.
- **Beer membership jeers** After purchasing a deal for a discount on beer club membership, including

some of the good stuff for free, one customer was surprised they had decided to charged him full price. After four weeks of phone frustration, the wrong was amicably righted, but not without a serious deal-buying hangover.

- **Massage voucher without the massage** Being the primary component of a pamper package, you would think a beauty salon offering a deal on massages would come through with the goods. However, a drawn-out facial was the best they could offer, and a refund was quickly sought afterwards.

Always
cross-
reference
any used
car seller
and car
details on
Google
before you
commit to
buying

+ BUYING A SECOND-HAND CAR

My used car nightmare

One CHOICE journalist shares her discovery of an unlicensed user car dealer.

Recently, I've been in the market for a used car. I found one I liked through a private seller on carsales.com.au, took it for a test drive, bought a REVS certificate and an RTA vehicle history check, which was supposed to tell me how many owners the vehicle has had in NSW and whether it had been written off anywhere in Australia. Everything seemed above board, so I left a deposit, signed a contract and agreed to pay the balance a couple of days later.

But that night, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was fishy. On a whim, I typed the number plate into Google. The car showed up on an auction site – it had been sold it as a repairable write-off a couple of years ago. There's nothing worse than that sinking feeling of being conned.

As I thought through the events of the day, I realised I'd missed what were, in hindsight, warning signs. Why had the sellers insisted on cash when I'd offered to pay by bank cheque? Why had they suggested I avoid paying stamp duty by recording a lower sale price on the notice of disposal, and asked if I was a cop when I refused? I was shocked that the vehicle history check hadn't flagged the issue, but because the RTA relies on insurance companies or police officers to inform them of write-offs, cars can slip through the cracks.

I used Google, Facebook and all the car sales sites I could think of and confirmed that the sellers were actually unlicensed dealers, using aliases to peddle vehicles on several websites. Not surprisingly, I wanted my deposit back.

The confrontation happened the next day. The dodgy operators agreed to refund my deposit, but had already spent half. They asked me to come back later, but I debated whether or

not to risk it. Was my safety worth \$350? Probably not. But I couldn't let it go!

Clearly, going back to owner's quiet street was not a good idea. The shopping centre around the corner would be a much more public option. Perhaps at this stage paranoia was taking its toll, but I felt that if they'd called in any back-up, a last-minute

venue change was my best bet.

Thirty minutes before our scheduled meeting, I rearranged the place.

An hour later I had most of my money, though \$50 was forfeited for "time wastage". Happy that I had at least managed to keep the majority of my cash, I went home slightly poorer, but much wiser.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



DON'T GET CAUGHT TOO

- **Always do a REVS and vehicle history check with your state road authority.**
- **Cross-reference any seller and car details on Google before you commit to buying.**
- **Walk away if something seems fishy** (the car is under-priced, or you're getting inconsistent stories from the owner). You're always better off safe than sorry.
- **Get an independent pre-purchase inspection done before putting a deposit on a vehicle.** Many companies offer this service nationwide.
- **Never pay cash.** Always insist on a bank cheque.
- **If you suspect criminal activity, report it to Crime Stoppers** on 1800 333 000, or call your local police station.



+ HOT CROSS BUNS

One a penny, two a penny...

Hot cross buns – nothing says Easter quite like these spicy treats. Whether you're a traditionalist or prefer them with choc chips, we find the ones to satisfy.

One of the best things about Easter – besides the chocolate – is the sweet smell of spice and fruit as you slather your first hot cross bun with butter. To find the best one, we recruited 22 hot cross bun enthusiasts from the CHOICE office and put their taste buds through their paces – testing varieties from Coles, Woolworths, Tip Top, Brumby's and Bakers Delight.

Sixteen of our 22 taste-testers say they prefer traditional fruit buns, with six preferring the chocolate ones. No one liked fruit-free buns best. We performed a randomised blind taste test, and asked those who prefer fruit in their buns to rate the traditional buns and those who prefer chocolate to rate the chocolate ones.

Traditional

THE FAVOURITE: Coles Fresh Baked Cross Buns 30% Fruit (\$4 for 6)

The rest (listed by rank*):

- 2 Tip Top Traditional Hot Cross Buns
- 3 Brumby's Traditional Hot Cross Buns
- 4 Bakers Delight Original Hot Cross Buns Traditional
- 5 Woolworths Traditional Hot Cross Buns

Coles topped this category, although they only impressed six of our 16 traditional bun fans. (Just three people disliked them.) So if you're after a classic hot cross bun, you can't go too wrong with these.

On the other hand, Coles' biggest rival Woolworths' buns were less well received. A few tasters said they contain very little fruit and are just "boring", with six people saying they dislike them.

! PEEL OR NO PEEL?

The question that divides hot cross bunsters nationwide. Some of you may ask, "what's peel?", and it's a fair question considering how difficult it is to find a bun with peel in these days. Peel is the orange or lemon

rind that gives fruit bread and buns their sour zing – and the bit you see some kids and adults picking out. Our online member poll revealed 78% prefer traditional fruit buns, 58% of these prefer no peel while 42% are peel lovers.

Chocolate

THE FAVOURITE: Brumby's Double Choc Hot Cross Buns (\$6.90 for 6)

The rest (listed by rank*):

- 2 Woolworths Mini Hot Cross Buns Choc Chip (equal second)
- 2 Bakers Delight Hot Cross Buns Choc Chip (equal second)
- 4 Woolworths Hot Cross Buns Mocha
- 5 Coles Fresh Baked Hot Cross Buns Chocolate Chip

If you prefer your hot cross buns chocolatey, Brumby's Double Choc should hit the mark. Five of our six chocolate bun eaters said they either liked these buns or liked them a lot. One participant described Woolworths Choc Chip Minis as having a "good colour, nice amount of chocolate and good mouthfeel".

Give the Coles chocolate ones a wide berth – one taster mentioned their "weird lingering aftertaste". They're the only chocolate buns we tested that no one said they would buy.

! A WORD ON FRUIT FREE

You might want to save these for the kids; this is the most unpopular variety in the bunch. Both Woolworths and Coles bun varieties tested attracted comments such as "why bother?", "what's the point?" and "not very hot cross bunny".



* Rank is based on the number of participants who liked each bun, over and above the number of people who disliked the bun.

ONE-STOP SEARCH

To find the cheapest online books without visiting each of these websites individually, try Booko.com.au. Consumers need only search once – Booko does all the hard work for you. It trawls local and international retailers and reports back with their prices, including shipping and in Australian dollars.

+ BOOK BUYING GUIDE

Buy the book

Chain, independent or online – where will you find the lowest prices, widest range, speediest delivery and best service for your next book?

Australian book retailers have been doing it tough recently. With the demise of Borders and Angus & Robertson, it's become apparent that the industry isn't what it used to be, in large part because of the simple, quick and cheap competition to bricks-and-mortar stores available on the internet.

Considering the direction the industry is taking, CHOICE assessed the options available to Australian consumers when deciding where to buy their books. We looked at three online retailers, one chain and one

independent and compared them for price for all three books (including shipping and in Australian dollars), speed of delivery, and product range. We also assessed service by attempting to cancel one item eight hours after placing an online order.

CHOICE purchased the same three books from each retailer: bestseller *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* by Stieg Larsson; the older, more obscure *The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court* by Jeffrey Toobin; and Australian hit *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

SHOPPING WITH A CONSCIENCE

Those who want to take advantage of bargain-basement prices but also do their bit for the planet are catered to by Better World Books, a US-based online store that's giving The Book Depository and Amazon a run for their money.

Aside from selling new titles, Better World Books also sells second-hand books collected from schools, colleges, libraries and charity shops around the US, saving tonnes of tomes from death by landfill. A share of the profits (so far more than \$9.3 million) is distributed to literacy programs around the world.

Like Amazon, Better World also provides a marketplace in which books can be bought and sold. Worldwide shipping directly from Better World is free, while marketplace books attract a \$7.97 per book flat fee.

All in all, the prices are some of the cheapest around, and then there's the warm fuzzy feeling of placating your social conscience – priceless.

SHRINKING ADVANTAGE

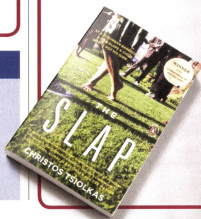
Leaving aside the issue of shopping locally and encouraging employment at home, there are other advantages to shopping in bricks-and-mortar stores rather than online. The immediate satisfaction of getting a book as soon as you want it, the tactile sensation of browsing the shelves, and the help of knowledgeable staff are the pay-off for the store's mark-up. But online stores are catching up. Many analyse browsing or purchasing history to make personalised recommendations, send around newsletters with views and reviews, encourage loyalty through online book clubs and offer pre-orders of upcoming releases, which can be delivered to your door the day they go on sale.

E-BOOKS

While the format is still in its infancy, readers are increasingly interested in e-books. Electronic versions often cost less than their paper equivalents, but the range isn't great for Australian consumers. Of the books on our list, CHOICE was able to pay less for *The Slap* and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* in electronic form, but we couldn't find *The Nine* in our region.

DISAPPOINTED BOOK LOVERS

Stuck with a Borders or Angus and Robertson gift card? Administrators have ruled you'll have to spend twice the face value of your voucher to redeem it, try your luck using it at a business that may emerge from administration, or register as an unsecured creditor and hope for the best. CHOICE media spokesperson Ingrid Just discusses the gift card dilemma on our blog, www.choice.com.au/community/choice-blog.



ONLINE VS BRICKS & MORTAR

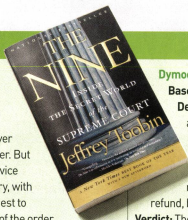
Amazon (www.amazon.com)**Base:** US**Price:** \$51.97**Delivery:** All books arrived 14 days after the order was placed.**Cancelled book:** No. Items had already been packed and dispatched, eight hours after the order was placed.**Returns policy:** Within 30 days, in new condition, at buyer's expense unless due to fault or incorrect delivery.**Verdict:** The American giant won third place in this year's People's CHOICE Online Retailer of the Year Award (see page 25). But beware the hidden costs that lie in the shipping charges – \$4.99 per shipment and \$4.99 per book. Still, their range is huge, books are mostly in stock, and turnaround time is quick – when we asked to cancel *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*, the books were already on their way.

There's a live help option where all your questions are answered by a live chat operator. The Amazon Marketplace also facilitates the buying and selling of used books.

The Book Depository International (www.bookdepository.com)**Base:** UK**Price:** \$35.68**Delivery:** *The Slap* arrived 15 days after purchase. *The Nine* arrived six days later.**Cancelled book:** Yes**Returns policy:** Within 30 days, in perfect condition, at the buyer's expense unless due to a fault or incorrect delivery.**Verdict:** With free shipping to almost anywhere and bargain basement prices on a huge variety of books, it's no wonder The Book Depository featured in the top 10 favourite online retailers at this year's CHOICE Awards. It was the cheapest retailer by far – more than \$16 less than nearest rival Amazon, and more than 50% less than the Australian bricks-and-mortar

equivalents.

It was also the slowest, taking three weeks to deliver the entire order. But customer service was exemplary, with an email request to cancel a part of the order promptly dealt with.

Booktopia (www.booktopia.com.au)**Base:** Australia**Price:** \$61.20**Delivery:** *The Slap* arrived 14 days after purchase. *The Nine* arrived three days later.**Cancelled book:** Yes**Returns policy:** Within 90 days in new condition in exchange for store credit, at buyer's expense.**Verdict:** Booktopia is a good option for those who want to take advantage of online savings but prefer to shop locally. Prices for our books were slightly higher than at Amazon and almost double those at The Book Depository, but product range is comparable, with Booktopia claiming to have more than two million titles available to buy. And those who prefer Australian literary gems are more likely to be catered for. Shipping charges are low – a flat \$6.50 per order – and customers are given the option of free pick-up at the company's Sydney premises. Booktopia's delivery policy is to bundle-ship items unless stragglers take more than a week to arrive, though you can pay a premium for immediate delivery book by book. Because of this policy, we had to wait 14 days for *The Slap*. Service is good, with email addresses and a phone number prominently displayed on the website for customer care purposes, and with prompt cancellation and refund of *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*.**Dymocks****Base:** Australia**Delivery:** Instant for available books. Six days for *The Nine*.**Price:** \$73.95**Returns policy:** With receipt within 60 days for refund, but limited to certain books.**Verdict:** There are more than 96 Dymocks retailers nationwide. However, while it is large, it does not have the range of books available at the online retailers, nor did it deliver on price. Dymocks did not stock *The Nine*, and we got mixed messages from Sydney and Melbourne stores about whether a copy could be ordered in. But their Booklover loyalty program rewards frequent shoppers, they send out newsletters with book news and reviews, and their stores display staff recommended reads. They also hold special events and readings.**Gleebooks****Base:** Australia**Price:** \$73.95**Delivery time:** Instant for available books. 10 days for *The Nine*.**Returns policy:** Within 14 days with receipt for refund, otherwise exchange or gift voucher.**Verdict:** This independent Sydney icon has expanded over time to six stores. With a dedicated children's shop and an antiques and second-hand store, as well as four other branches, there's a good range of products. Staff are also happy to order in books that aren't in stock – they managed to have *The Nine* in store 10 days after the order was placed, beating out all their online competitors on speed. Price-wise, the independent is on par with Dymocks for these books, despite the larger chain's bulk-buying power. Gleebooks is always a hub of activity, with a number of events on every week including author talks and workshops.

Making life easy for you!

choice

RECOMMENDED

choice.com.au

You've done your research, checked out the CHOICE comparison tables and now you're **ready to shop**. But once you're in the store, there are so many products in front of you, you've forgotten what you came in to get.

CHOICE can still help!

Last year we launched CHOICE Recommended – our **endorsement scheme** allows manufacturers to use the CHOICE Recommended logo on a range of products. This means you can easily **find some of the products that have made our What to Buy list**.

Next time you go shopping, look out for the CHOICE Recommended logo



Want CHOICE to help you even more with your shopping? Upgrade to CHOICE Plus and take advantage of our handy Price and Buy tool. Simply click on Price and Buy on our website, and a price comparison page will display the best prices supplied by retailers – both online and in physical stores – as well as information about warranty, service and delivery terms. **To upgrade, visit www.choice.com.au/upgrade**

+ TRADITIONAL & ONLINE SHOPPING

Customer care

Service and rights are the focus of CHOICE's new campaign for better shopping.

The phrase "the customer is always right" is not one you hear much these days, but that wasn't always the case. In the days of old-fashioned retailers such as Sydney's Mark Foy's, New York's Macy's and London's Selfridges, this mantra shone through in the gentle civility of well-trained sales staff.

But today's consumers might be forgiven for finding mixed messages as they navigate the ever-changing and competitive retail landscape of online, bricks-and-mortar and now clicks-and-mortar (shorthand for both a real and virtual) retail outlets.

More and more shoppers feel they're being treated right by the online offerings in terms of personalised service (even

Consumers can be forgiven for not feeling they're always right when shopping in today's traditional retailers

though they never see a human sales assistant), range and price. And recently, consumers have come under fire from those who see themselves as the modern-day standard bearers for the great retailers.

Take Gerry Harvey, Premier Investments chairman Solomon Lew and Myer boss Bernie Brookes, all of whom have railed against consumers who choose to head overseas and online. Along with others, they have targeted the government for not closing the \$1000 GST-free threshold on imported goods.

But the subtext has become that it is somehow unpatriotic to take one's custom to other countries and undermine the business model of the chains and franchises located in big shopping centres. More than a few shopkeepers also accused consumers of being unethical for using their floorspace as a showroom to check out everything from shoes to skis and then buying them for less online.

On the flipside, CHOICE has found many consumers use the internet and our reviews to research purchases, so that when they visit a bricks-and-mortar retailer, they already know exactly what they want and how much they're prepared to pay.

Another vexed retail sector is books, where the growth of online booksellers – some

of whom deliver overseas for free – and the strength of the Australian dollar have caused real pain to the established players. [See our story on how booksellers shape up on page 11.] They might have the protection of territorial copyright and controls on parallel importing, but consumers are bypassing these hurdles and shopping direct.

These issues are all being considered by the Productivity Commission in their broad-ranging inquiry into the economic structure and performance of Australia's retail industry. CHOICE has already had preliminary talks with the commissioners, and will be finalising a submission by May this year.

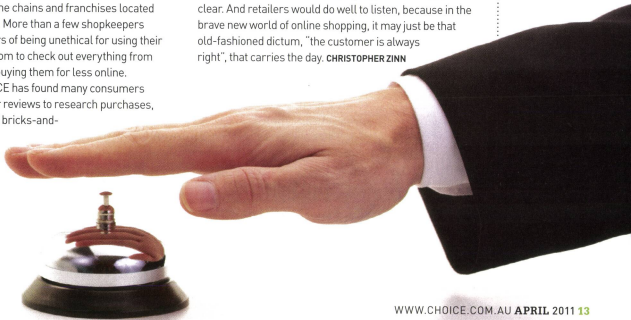
Our starting point is that what is good for consumers is good for better businesses. We want the commission to examine how the globalised online environment can be made to work in the interests of Australian consumers, and in turn reward better Australian retailers.

We will look at issues such as consumer protection, including warranties for online imports, and the availability and restrictions on imports, such as controls on the parallel importation of books. We intend to use international examples to show how technology and globalisation can be made to work in the interests of domestic retailers and consumers.

We also want to hear from you to ensure your needs are front and centre. We're planning our next consumer tour to be as widespread as possible and will let you know details soon.

CHOICE will ensure the interests of consumers are communicated to the Productivity Commission loud and clear. And retailers would do well to listen, because in the brave new world of online shopping, it may just be that old-fashioned dictum, "the customer is always right", that carries the day. **CHRISTOPHER ZINN**

CHOICE will ensure the interests of consumers are conveyed loud and clear



+ HANDHELD ESPRESSO MACHINE

Twisted cuppa

Handheld espresso makers still don't make a decent cup of coffee.

On-the-go handheld espresso makers are tempting for those who want a perfect shot of coffee any time, anywhere. CHOICE didn't recommend the Handpresso Wild Domepod last year, but we thought we'd keep an open mind to the MyPressi Twist.

The Twist weighs 1.1kg and is ball-shaped with a handle. The ball houses the filter and water container, while the handle holds the

nitrous oxide pressure cartridge, and its operating pressure is about nine bars. Each cartridge has enough pressure to make up to four double (eight single) shots of espresso. To operate, screw the pressure cartridge in place, fill the basket with coffee or insert an ESE coffee pod, then fill the water bowl with boiling water (you'll need an electric jug) and lock the cap firmly. Position the spouts over the cup, pull the trigger on the handle and voila, you have a shot of espresso. Instructions recommend using 18g-21g of coffee for a double shot, not the industry-recommended 14g.

The water tanks for these products still don't seem to be able to maintain the desired 92°C-93°C long enough for the water to pass through the coffee. The result is under-extracted coffee and a less-than-ideal temperature. Our tester found that you'll get a better result if you use freshly ground coffee

beans. The Twist produced crema, but this also tasted under extracted. Using pre-ground supermarket coffee gave very little crema with undesirable large bubbles.

CHOICE VERDICT

The Twist is best suited for those who are always on the move, and have access to an electric jug in their hotel room or office, or can boil water if camping. However, it's very expensive, particularly after you've factored in the ongoing cost of replacing the pressure cartridges. **REBECCA GATTO**



MYPRESSI TWIST

Price \$249

Contact www.mypressi.com.au



+ ENERGY-EFFICIENT POWER SWITCH

Mass switch-off

Turning off several appliances at once with this simple switch can save you power around the home.

If you turn off the power to your electrical products when you're not using them, you'll reduce your carbon footprint and electricity costs. Ecoswitch claims to make the process easier.

Designed to sit between a wall socket and a power board, it has a switch that can be

attached to a wall or left in an easy-to-reach place so you can turn off the power. It even has a light (which turns off when you switch off the power to your appliances) so you can find it in the dark. Although this light requires some power, the Ecoswitch's energy usage is very low and easily compensated for by using the device to turn off appliances that would usually be left on standby.

There are two downsides to the device:

- If you don't use it and leave everything on, it becomes just another appliance using a small amount of power in your home.
- Turning off some appliances can mean you have to reset clocks or settings every time you turn them back on. The Ecoswitch website does address this issue, quite rightly asking you to consider how many of your

appliances really need to be on all the time - you can always put critical ones on a separate power source.

CHOICE VERDICT

Assuming you use it, turning several electrical appliances off at the wall will save you money and reduce the power used when those products would be in standby mode. Ecoswitch is a cheap and simple product that can help you save money and energy. **CHRIS RUGGLES**



ECOSWITCH

Price \$20

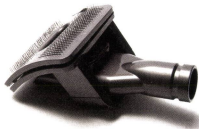
Contact www.ecoswitch.com.au



+ DOG GROOM TOOL

Dyson dog doohickey

Got a Dyson vacuum and a dog? Then this may be a must-have.



Dogs shed a lot of hair, and if you're a dog owner, you probably spend a fair amount of time brushing your dog to keep its coat – and your floors and furniture – under control. But brushing a dog can also generate a lot of loose hair, which you then need to sweep or vacuum.

The Dyson Groom Tool is designed to make that job a lot easier. It fits most Dyson vacuum cleaners and has a spring-loaded slicker brush, which you hold down with your thumb as you brush your dog. When the brush is full of hair, release your thumb and the bristles retract through the face plate, pushing the hair off so it's sucked through the central hole. It's designed for use on medium- and long-haired dogs. Demonstration videos are on the Dyson website (see below).

Two CHOICE dog owners tried the tool. One used it on her golden retriever and German shepherd, and found it effective and quicker than her usual brush, as there was no cleaning up required. She said she'd buy one if she owned a Dyson vacuum. Her dogs didn't mind the vacuum noise – at least, no more than usual. The other tester tried it on her Jack Russell cross and terrier-dachshund cross. These are both short-haired breeds and not as suited to the tool,

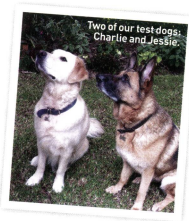
but she said it was still effective. However, neither of these dogs liked the sound of the vacuum near them and wouldn't keep still or calm enough to be groomed.

Dyson make no claims about the Groom Tool's suitability for cats, but like short-haired dogs, if you use a slicker brush and your cat doesn't mind the noise, it might be suitable for you. But that's the main problem with this accessory; as well as needing a Dyson vacuum, you'll have trouble using it if your pet doesn't like the vacuum's noise.

CHOICE VERDICT

You need a Dyson vacuum and a dog that's not scared of the vacuum's noise, but otherwise the Dyson Groom Tool does just what it claims: mess-free, vacuum-assisted dog grooming.

CHRIS BARNES

**COMING UP**

CHOICE staff members are busy putting **wireless headphones** through their paces, wearing them throughout the day to find out which are the most comfortable and easy to use. So do you really need to spend up to \$549 to guarantee quality?

We also test 10 new **dishwashers**, including the latest models released by Miele and Bosch, the most reliable dishwasher brands according to our members (see www.choice.com.au/reliability for more).

**DYSON GROOM TOOL**

Price \$89

Contact www.dyson.com.au



YOUR SAY

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

SIM shock

I recently visited Japan and picked up a SIM card from the Mobal booth at Narita Airport, Tokyo, for use in my mobile phone during my two-week stay. I travel extensively, so while in Japan I decided to use a local Japanese SIM card to keep my communication costs down. I then used my phone as normal.

With every other local SIM provider, this amount of usage costs about \$50 per month for 1GB of data downloaded and a few local phone calls. Mobal Japan has charged me \$7150 for two weeks' usage, which has left me with a very negative experience of my trip to Japan.

Please warn your readers about this extortionate business practice

operating out of Narita Airport.

Robert Perring, West Leederville, WA.

CHOICE SAYS Buying a local SIM should be a simple way to use your phone cheaply when overseas, but as Robert found, this isn't always the case. While the charges seem over the top, the call charge rates for this service aren't hidden - they're shown clearly on Mobal Japan's website in yen. A simple conversion of the yen rates reveals data is charged at about \$50 per MB, meaning that in no time at all you would be facing a huge bill if you do any downloading or file transfers. The flat rate for SMS is roughly \$1.70 per text and the flat rate for calls to most mobiles is \$2.90 per minute. Another provider, SoftBank



(www.softbank-rental.jp), has SMS and voice call rates a fraction of Mobal's, and rent out SIMs, so is probably a better option when in Japan.

THUMBS UP!

Willem Ponsen of Calamvale, Qld, had two La-Z-Boy recliner chairs that were a couple of months outside of their 10-year warranty for the frame, when he noticed the bottom frames on both chairs were starting to warp. Not only did La-Z-Boy honour the warranty, Willem also gives their Brisbane service agent Action Upholstery a thumbs up for their excellent service.

EMAIL OF THE MONTH

Sweating on air-con repairs

We recently had a Panasonic air conditioner (well within its warranty period) break down in the middle of a heatwave. We contacted Panasonic, and were told that the report would be lodged with an external repair company, who would contact us in about five days to make a time to attend the problem. When we expressed our dismay at this delay, we were told it was out of their hands.

As the product was under warranty, it was not possible to contact another repairer. We were unable to contact Panasonic's nominated repairer - all we could do was sit in sweltering heat, waiting

for the repairer, but just to find out when the repairer could come.

I believe manufacturers offering a warranty have a responsibility to ensure that repairs are conducted quickly and efficiently, or that at the very least trusting consumers are not thrust into bureaucratic limbo. I suggest that anyone else in this position obtain permission to find their own repairer directly.

Barry Newman, Bateman, WA

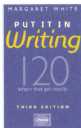
CHOICE SAYS Five days is a long period to wait, especially just to make a time for the actual repairer to visit. We recommend you complain in writing to Panasonic, as

their contracted repair services should provide a better response time than this. If you get no satisfaction, contact your state's consumer department.

It sounds like the air conditioner was a recent purchase. In that case, repair work must take place within a reasonable time, regardless of whether the work is outsourced. For most air conditioner faults, repair should be possible in one visit or at most a few days.



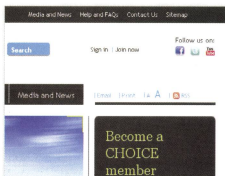
EMAIL OF THE MONTH Barry receives *Put It In Writing*, or any other book of his choice at www.choice.com.au/books. Unfortunately we are unable to answer all the emails and letters we receive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and clarity.



ONLINE THIS MONTH

If you haven't visited www.choice.com.au for a while, you'll notice some subtle improvements when you return – a little finetuning based on visitor feedback. If you mainly use the search function to find what you're looking for, try navigating to one of the sections (Household, Money, etc) and then clicking through the topics displayed. It's also the best way to explore our new-look pages. We hope you enjoy the changes. Here are some of the things to look out for.

1 Sign in/log out has moved



Many of you said you found the position of the sign-in box distracting, so we've moved it to the top of the page next to Search. It will follow you throughout the site, so you can easily edit your profile or sign in or out as you navigate.

2 Sections are more user friendly

Home entertainment

Independent and trusted tests, reviews and investigations of the latest audio and visual entertainment products.

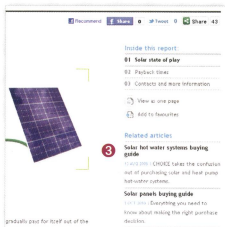


Top 10 Popular Articles Top 10 Recent Articles



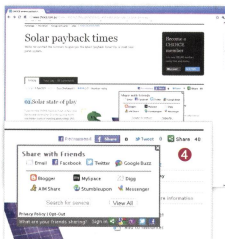
We've separated individual product categories into their own pages so you can find things that interest you and easily browse through what's there.

3 Related articles are now easier to find



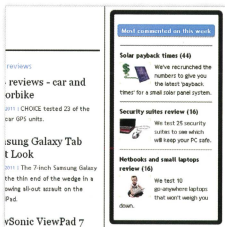
We've made related articles more prominent so you can immediately see other relevant tests and reviews.

4 It's easier to share your favourites



Facebook, Twitter, MySpace ... Buttons now appear on every page so sharing favourite articles with friends is now just a click away.

5 See what people are talking about



When you're on the home page, cast your eye right to see which three articles have attracted the most comments over the past week. Read other member reviews and questions or jump into the conversation yourself.

UPGRADE TO CHOICE *Plus*+

If you're an existing magazine subscriber and don't have an online membership, upgrade now to CHOICE Plus and get the best of both worlds.

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MEMBER NOTICEBOARD

We've been very busy this month with the CHOICE Awards and our Better Banking Campaign. This month's spotlight is on Ingrid Just, our Media Manager and spokesperson. We'd love to hear from you – please email us at member@choice.com.au and let us know your thoughts.

Tell us what you think

We're always interested in what you have to say and would like to invite you to share your thoughts and what you would like to see in these pages in coming issues. Feel free to email us at member@choice.com.au with any feedback or comments you may have.



Hot Cross Bun Bonanza

CHOICE staff enjoyed some of the perks of the job, taste-testing hot cross buns for Easter.

See what our staff had to say in our story on page 9!



Would you like to tour our labs?

CHOICE has held its famous Lab Tours for many years now, and we'd like to invite you to join us. We'll be scheduling a tour in the coming months, so please register your interest with us at member@choice.com.au if you'd like to come along. These tours are a great opportunity for members to get a look behind the scenes of all our onsite testing. You'll hear some fascinating background information and have the chance to meet our testers. Morning or afternoon tea will be provided, and you'll also have a chance to meet and chat with Nick Stace and Christopher Zinn, so don't miss out! Watch this space for more information on dates and times.



Spotlight

CHOICE Media Manager and spokesperson, Ingrid Just



How did you come to work at CHOICE?

After working as a broadcaster with the ABC for 10 years I moved to Sydney and spent a year working on the other side of the fence in media communications. I jumped at the opportunity to work with CHOICE, an organisation whose work I have always valued.

What is a typical day for you?

I always like to exercise first thing in the morning, so even if I have to be at a TV station at 5:45am I will still get up and go for a run – sometimes this means a 4am start. The reward is a clear head and getting to see the sunrise! If it's a big media day, the radio calls will then begin at 6am. In between the media work there are meetings with editorial, marketing, campaigns and online teams. After work I try and catch up with mates, or take a book down to my local cafe and do some people watching, generally while juggling a few radio calls. Thank goodness for mobiles!

What's something that our readers won't know about you?

I used to be heavily involved in rowing at state and national levels, and I collect Smurfs.

What have been the highlights since joining CHOICE?

Working on the Better Banking Campaign, travelling interstate to help host member and community forums and having the chance to speak with and get to know our members. I also love being able to walk a few steps and speak with any of our amazingly insightful testers about what to look for when buying almost any item. Irons, coffee machines, ice-cream, cereals and deodorants – you name it, CHOICE has tested it.

Which five people would you invite to a dinner party?

Michael J Fox, Adam Gilchrist, Dolly Parton, David Williamson and Hamish Blake.

If you'd like to be our member in the spotlight for our next issue, send your details to inthspotlight@choice.com.au.

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and Twitter



**AND THE
WINNERS
ARE...**

choice

AWARDS 2011

WINNER

CHOICE AWARDS 2011 SPECIAL

Welcome to the second annual CHOICE Awards, where we celebrate the best of the best in the Oscars of the Australian consumer world.

For more than 50 years, CHOICE has been a driving force for innovation in consumer products, services and organisations. Complementing our infamous Shonkys, where we name and shame all things dodgy, the CHOICE Awards recognise and reward those who are doing the right thing by consumers.

This year, we're offering bouquets across nine important categories:

- p20** Consumer Champion
- p21** People's CHOICE Best Retail Establishment, including Best Online Retailer
- p26** People's CHOICE Best Value Mobile Phone Service
- p29** Best Online Savings Account
- p32** Best Low-Fee Bank Account
- p35** Best TV Brand
- p40** Best Washing Machine Brand
- p46** Best Restaurant Hygiene Rating Scheme

So without further ado, the short lists please ...

Our call for
Consumer
Champion
nominations
revealed many
dedicated
and
inspirational
candidates

STORY KARINA BRAY

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Whether individually or as part of a group, this award acknowledges the contribution of those who are working hard to make sure consumers get a better deal.

Our call for nominations for Consumer Champion turned up many dedicated and inspirational candidates for our judges – CHOICE CEO, Nick Stace, CHOICE Council Chair, Jenni Mack, and last year's CHOICE Consumer Action Award winner, Ian Jarratt.

After considering the nominees' contributions to Australian consumers and achievements in the past year, our panel chose two outstanding consumer advocates. **Adam Brimo**, whose innovative and successful Vodafone campaign found widespread support, was given this year's CHOICE Consumer Champion Award, while lawyer **Denis Nelthorpe** was acknowledged for his tireless work on behalf of society's most vulnerable consumers with a Lifetime Achievement Award. ■

Adam Brimo

CONSUMER CHAMPION AWARD

This 23-year-old software engineering graduate set up www.vodafone.com.au in response to problems he and others were experiencing with Vodafone's mobile network and customer service. The website acts as a conduit, supplying updates and information to Vodafone customers while inviting other consumers to share stories of their problems with the carrier – to the tune of more than 15,000 complaints so far. It attracted national media attention and prompted a class action that more than 22,000 people had joined at the time of writing.

After analysing the complaints made by fellow Vodafone customers via the website, Adam compiled and submitted a report to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and Australian Communications and Media Authority based on their experiences. In the meantime, Vodafone CEO Nigel Dews has apologised and promised to take steps to address network issues and increase the number of customer service staff.

No longer a Vodafone customer and unlikely to personally gain from his campaign's success, Adam kept going so that others could benefit. Our judges were impressed by Adam's savvy activism as he identified a pressing consumer issue and used limited resources to great effect.



Denis Nelthorpe

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

A lawyer, Denis could have pursued a lucrative legal career in private practice. Instead, he chose to stay in the not-for-profit sector working with the most disadvantaged consumers in our community. He has worked tirelessly on their behalf, whether they're individuals, groups or community advocacy groups, over a career spanning several decades. Denis' achievements include:



- **Using settlement funds from the Household Finance Corporations test case to establish a new consumer advocacy centre** that became part of the present day's Consumer Action Law Centre – one of the largest consumer organisations in Australia today.
- **Leading the Consumers' Federation of Australia**, where he drove reforms that ensured the federation focuses on small volunteer organisations working in relative isolation on local issues that often have national implications.
- **Getting insurance company AAMI to develop a customer charter** that sets the benchmark for other insurance companies.
- **His work on behalf of low-income and disadvantaged consumers in the insurance industry**, raising awareness with government and the industry of the difficulties these consumers face in obtaining affordable insurance.
- **His work on bulk consumer debt negotiations**, which will change the way financial institutions deal with hardship applications by vulnerable consumers.
- **The Taxi Driver Legal Project**, his most recent project, which aims to deliver specialist legal advice to low-income taxi drivers, many of whom are recent migrants with limited English, who find themselves underinsured and exposed to massive debts in the event of an accident.

Our judges were impressed by the breadth and legacy of Denis' involvement in fighting for the rights of vulnerable consumers and his role in mentoring others, acknowledging the high regard in which he's held.



QUICK GUIDE

Total votes cast: 12,477
 Respondents who shopped online: 71%
 Female respondents: 53%
 Most important factor in deciding where to shop: Products are in stock when required
 Least important factor: Self-service checkouts are available

STORY ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

Top of the shops

Want to know where to shop for almost anything? More than 12,000 CHOICE members weigh in on Australia's most popular online and bricks-and-mortar retailers, picking the stars from the duds.

CHOICE surveyed 12,477 members, asking them to score shops in eight retail sectors for a variety of factors, including range of products, staff helpfulness and price, and also to nominate their favourite overall shopping destinations.

The results were surprising. While respondents to similar surveys by CHOICE's UK sister publication, *Which?*, rated price as the most important factor influencing their shopping habits, CHOICE members were more interested in product range. This may account for the popularity of larger retailers and the growing trend towards online shopping, where almost any product is just a click away.

The survey also found that customers prefer retailers that meet their expectations – they don't demand that warehouse-style bargain marts provide a good in-store environment, but do expect a wide range of products in stock at a low price. Customers rate upmarket chains well for ambience and after-sales service, but also for pricing.

Service please

Despite some large retailers recently crying foul about the tax treatment of online shopping, our survey found that CHOICE members will visit stores that do not rate well for price as long as staff are helpful, knowledgeable and plentiful. In fact, several top overall performers ranked lower on price, but all these stores rated well on most aspects of customer service. "Where staff are knowledgeable I have been happy to pay a bit more as I know I'm getting what I want and need," said one respondent.

Step right up

When it comes to stores, bigger isn't always better – especially come queuing time. Many survey respondents complained about the lack of cash registers and staff at the retailing giants, with queuing time leaving a lot to be desired in most departments of Big W, Kmart, Target, Woolworths and Myer stores. Sports retailer The Athlete's Foot scored top, with 72% of respondents rating them as very good or excellent for queuing. >

HOW WE SURVEY

12,477 CHOICE members scored their favourite retailers for 2010. We asked about where they had shopped in the past six months and how important different aspects of shopping were to them. Respondents were also asked to rate two of the retailers they had shopped at. They were asked to score several features, which are reported in the tables as the percentage of "very good" or "excellent" votes. Finally, all respondents voted for their favourite bricks-and-mortar and online retailers.

Cheap and cheerful

< After product range, 95% of survey respondents told us that reasonably priced items were important or essential in deciding where to spend their hard-earned dosh. There were good price performers in all sectors, but certain areas, such as toiletries, cosmetics and home & garden, had fewer stores rating well on price – the electrical sector rated better with our members.

No doubt seeking better bang for their buck, many consumers are turning to the internet, probably as a price equaliser. Several of our top 10 online retailers are praised by some customers as significantly better value than their competitors.

Setting the mood

In total, 76% of respondents rated a pleasant in-store environment as a very important or essential factor in deciding where to shop. Loud and unpleasant music, aisles that were untidy and crowded, and poor climate control all featured as shopping turn-offs. "They need to turn down the in-store music," said one respondent. "The people at the checkout can hardly hear anything you say – it makes shopping hard work!" >

STORE WARS

In each of the six retail sectors where Myer and David Jones went head to head, DJs received a higher percentage of "good" or "excellent" ratings. DJs mostly rated better for price, staff helpfulness and store environment. "I really prefer David Jones for atmosphere, staff helpfulness and range of clothing," said one respondent. "They also price match. I only use Myer when it is more convenient, but it is cluttered, untidy and does not stock the fashions I prefer."

But while David Jones seems on the surface to have emerged unscathed from sexual harassment allegations levelled at former CEO Mark McInnes, some respondents mentioned that the scandal had impacted on their shopping decisions. "For us, they still suffer from the sexual harassment mess," said one shopper. "I have never had a problem with DJs but feel reluctant to shop there after the sexual harassment issue," said another. But some took a different view: "I did consider a boycott after the McInnes matter, but decided against it because the board acted quickly."

Electrical retailers

The Good Guys were the pick of the electrical retailer crop – not surprising, considering they took out the inaugural People's CHOICE Award for Best Retailer last year. A great all-rounder, they rated highest for range of products, after-sales service, store environment and price,

and came a close second for staff helpfulness. Customers praised the store for product variety and staff knowledge, but a few had reservations about their discounting policies. "Ticket prices tend to be inflated to accommodate their pay-less-for-cash terms," one responder believed.

Bing Lee, Retravision and JB Hi-Fi also rated well in this sector, edging out the competition on price and service. But Harvey Norman, last year's runner up for the People's CHOICE Award, put in a lacklustre performance, rating above average for product range but not so well for price and after-sales service. A few respondents mentioned the retailer's campaign to apply GST to online shopping orders. "I'm probably not going back after Gerry Harvey's outburst about online shopping!" said one shopper. "Their sale prices are easily beaten by Australian GST-paying online stores!" said another.

Myer, Big W, Target and Kmart didn't rate so well in this sector, with staff availability a problem. "In Myer, finding anyone to help is a miracle and finding someone who can help is even rarer!"

Rank	Retailer	Overall (%)	Range (%)	Staff helpfulness (%)	Price (%)
1	The Good Guys	66	66	63	65
2	Bing Lee	56	46	55	55
3	Retravision	55	44	66	51
4	JB Hi-Fi	52	64	46	57
7	Myer	20	31	31	23
8	Big W	17	18	15	41
9	Target	12	15	14	27
10	Kmart	8	13	12	36

Percentages are based on between 164 and 612 responses.

"I'm probably not going back after Gerry Harvey's outburst"

Clothes, shoes & accessories

Rank	Retailer	Overall (%)	Range (%)	Staff helpfulness (%)	Price (%)
1	David Jones	49	59	48	19
2	Millers	47	36	61	73
5	Just Jeans	31	25	51	30
6	Myer	30	42	27	15
7	Target	29	36	15	42
8	Jay Jays	29	33	34	54
9	Best & Less	25	27	21	67
10	Big W	22	28	18	44

Percentages are based on between 187 and 890 responses.

There was room for improvement for stores selling clothes, shoes and accessories.

"You'd be a mug to shop retail in Australia!"

Top scorer **David Jones** only rated 49% as a very good or excellent place to shop overall. DJs didn't rate well on price (neither did Myer), but rated well on range, after-sales service and store environment.

Although many were prepared to pay the department store premium, there were plenty who sought better value: the second, third and fourth

places in this sector went to Millers, Lowes and Rivers – all known for their sale campaigns. Millers topped the price and staff helpfulness categories; according to one fan, you always know what you're going to get there. "The goods are exactly as depicted, and if it does not fit I can take it back."

In this sector, 30% of survey respondents said they shopped online. Perhaps influenced by eBay's cheeky "browse it at Westfield, buy it brand new on eBay" campaign, many shoppers mentioned finding the perfect item in store, then finding the perfect price online. "You'd be a mug to shop retail in Australia these days!" said one respondent. Another said: "My friends and I try things on in a department store and then buy the same item for much less online. We'd be stupid to do anything else."



"Help yourself or go without"

Toiletries & cosmetics

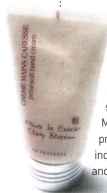
The top place-getters in this sector were a mixed bag. **David Jones** scored highest on product range and store environment but fared badly on price. Runner-up was Chemist Warehouse, which scored higher for price, but had a store environment

one reviewer described as "help yourself or go without".

Independent stores saw 46% shopping there. Many said they preferred the individualised service and expert advice of

their local retailer.

Online shopping in this category was popular. Websites such as StrawberryNET were used by 24% to capitalise on savings enhanced by the skyrocketing Aussie dollar, with some complaining these savings were not passed on by bricks-and-mortar retailers. "Products that I would otherwise have to buy at DJs, Myer or a beauty salon are at least half price on StrawberryNET and are delivered free of charge, usually within a few days of ordering," raved one respondent.

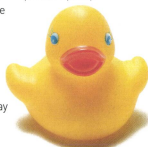


Toys & games

CHOICE shoppers appreciate unique toys and games with an educational twist – **The Australian Geographic Shop** came in as an overwhelming favourite overall in this category. With a whopping 74% of customers describing AGS staff helpfulness as very good or excellent, and the rating of their product range on par with that of giant Toys R Us, it's not surprising that this store performed well. "I love the amazing range of toys they have, especially for inquisitive children of all ages, and I love that all of the toys and games encourage exploration and curiosity!" said one respondent.

But if this sector is anything to judge by, you don't always get what you pay for when you're dishing out

the big bucks. **David Jones** and **Myer** rated equal last on price, and rated below average on stock availability. Furthermore, 11% of survey respondents recently had cause to complain about an issue at Myer. The Reject Shop was placed last overall by survey respondents; it had by far the highest rating for price, but the shopping experience did not rate well. Customers tended to shop at the cheapie for stocking fillers or party bag items, but had low expectations of product quality.



Sport & leisure

Rank	Retailer	Overall (%)	Range (%)	Staff helpfulness (%)	Price (%)
1	The Athlete's Foot	58	58	80	20
2	Rebel Sports	34	50	40	16
5	Sports Power	33	37	54	18
6	Lowes	29	29	66	75
7	Best & Less	23	19	30	60
8	Kmart	14	17	15	48
9	Target	11	12	12	33
10	Myer	10	13	25	13

Percentages are based on between 100 and 331 responses.

The Athlete's Foot came out on top of the competition despite their prices leaving a lot to be desired. Several respondents were also particularly impressed with the store's returns policy. "The prices are not discounted, but I feel confident shopping there," said one respondent. "They don't rush you and there is no problem with returning

shoes if you're not happy. Staff give you all the attention and time you need."

Bottom of the scale were Kmart, Target and Myer, which were judged by many as lacking in product range and staff helpfulness.



Baby & toddler

Surprisingly, these stores underperformed when it came to creating a child-friendly environment. **Pumpkin Patch** rated top for babies and toddlers, but only 54% of respondents were impressed by their child

friendliness. Other retailers in this sector performed far worse, with only 16%–26% of respondents rating their child friendliness as very good or excellent. "The stores are hard to negotiate with a stroller or pram," said one Best & Less shopper. "If I see a lot of people in there I just don't bother going in!" Mass retailer Woolworths was described by one shopper as "a sterile experience, [where] you're left to your own devices."



"The prices are not discounted, but I feel confident shopping there"

"The stores are hard to negotiate with a stroller or pram"



Home entertainment

Rank	Retailer	Overall (%)	Range (%)	Staff helpfulness (%)	Price (%)
1	The Good Guys	63	69	64	69
2	JB Hi-Fi	59	77	49	58
3	Bing Lee	48	52	56	58
4	Retravision	46	41	59	39
5	Harvey Norman	43	61	46	33
8	Big W	23	26	17	45
9	Myer	15	25	30	18
10	Kmart	14	16	15	41

Percentages are based on between 120 and 339 responses.

The home entertainment sector, which included books, DVDs, CDs and computer/electronic games, is a competitive one. Last year's People's CHOICE Award winner, **The Good Guys**, went head to head with last year's finalist, discounting giant JB Hi-Fi. Of our survey respondents, 61% shopped at JB, while The Good Guys

JB Hi-Fi customers had cause to complain, our survey respondents had more problems with The Good Guys – 12% had had issues with the retailer in the past six months.

As with the electrical sector, respondents tended to prefer shopping at specialist stores for home entertainment. David Jones, Big W, Myer and Kmart

"When you request an item at Big W, you're always told they can't get it"

managed to attract only 8%. However, these products are not a core part of the Good Guys range. But despite the difference, The Good Guys still managed to edge out JB as a better overall place to shop, rating higher on staff helpfulness, after-sales service, store environment and price. However, while only 7% of

were not rated well in this category by CHOICE members, with customers unimpressed with product range, availability of stock and staff knowledge. "When you request an item at Big W, you're always told they can't get it. And you have to queue for long periods of time, just to ask simple questions of their staff."

Home & garden

Rank	Retailer	Overall (%)	Range (%)	Staff helpfulness (%)	Price (%)
1	Local nursery	57	55	75	23
2	Bunnings	53	74	52	38
3	Home Timber & Hardware	47	48	69	25
4	Mitre 10	46	41	61	27
5	Thrifty Link	42	35	70	23
8	Big W	21	23	20	41
9	Kmart	16	14	13	35
10	Woolworths	11	7	22	25

Percentages are based on between 174 and 1698 responses.

The home and garden sector is dominated by Bunnings. Of the survey respondents who'd recently bought home and garden goods, 88% had shopped at the warehouse giant – the highest percentage of any store in any sector. It's likely that the huge range of products kept customers coming back, with 85% saying they would probably or definitely recommend Bunnings to a friend or family member.

But while this store was hugely popular, coming second in the Home & Garden category only to local nurseries and taking out our People's CHOICE Bricks & Mortar Retailer of the Year Award for 2011 (see above right), several survey respondents were concerned about Bunnings' expansion plans. "I would prefer to shop elsewhere but Bunnings seems to have put the other hardware stores in the area out of business, so I don't have a lot of choice," said one unhappy customer.

Another explained: "It's the only store in town so I feel a bit trapped. It sells items at very cheap prices, which may seem good at first, but I seriously question their service."

The local nursery was the preferred place to shop, providing good service and a positive store environment. But the little guys didn't rate well for price and were only average for product range. And several respondents were worried about their long-term viability. Big W, Kmart and Woolworths did not rate well overall and, ironically, True Value Hardware rated lowest for price.



PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD

Best bricks & mortar retailer... Bunnings

BRICKS AND MORTAR RETAILERS

Rank	Retailer	Votes
1	Bunnings	2180
2	David Jones	1507
3	Myer	997
4	JB Hi-Fi	747
5	Big W	726
6	Target	682
7	ABC Shop	600
8	The Good Guys	424
9	Harvey Norman	376
10	Woolworths	355

The top 10 People's CHOICE retailers were a mixed bag of stores. But despite some stiff competition, 2180 survey respondents gave their stamp of approval to **Bunnings**. It may have been the product range, extended trading hours, friendly service or the ample parking that won over our members. Or, it may have been the humble sausage sizzle, mentioned by many shoppers as a weekend delight.

The Good Guys, who rated top of both their categories, came in eighth, while JB Hi-Fi managed fourth spot. Interestingly, survey respondents highlighted JB's willingness to match online quotes – a cut above many of the bricks and mortar stores. Harvey Norman, which came second last year, dropped off to ninth overall – perhaps hurt by the firestorm response to Gerry Harvey's criticism of GST exemptions for online purchases.

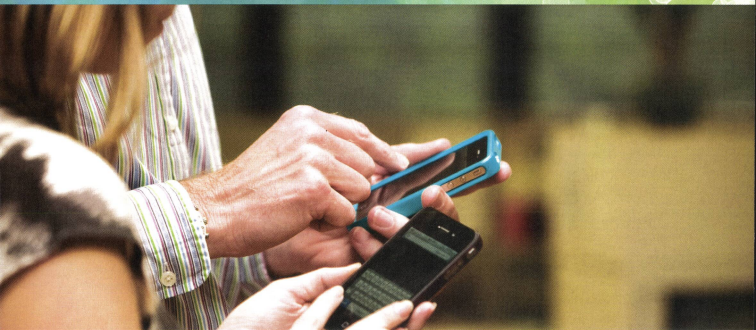
Best online retailer... eBay

ONLINE RETAILERS

Rank	Retailer	Votes
1	eBay	2442
2	Apple	542
3	Amazon	536
4	Deals Direct	333
5	Ticketek	296
6	Ezibuy	270
7	Catch of the Day	225
8	The Book Depository	195
9	Get Price	182
10	StrawberryNET	174

eBay comfortably took out this award. A groundswell of popular support gave the online auction site almost 29% of the vote – a whopping 22% ahead of next place-getters, Apple and Amazon. Participants praised eBay for price, product range and security. Shoppers were also particularly impressed by the independent retailers on the site and number of unusual items available to buy. "There is such a good range and you can buy direct from independent suppliers rather than corporate chains," said one devotee.

Price seems to be a top consideration for the CHOICE online shopper. Of the top 10 stores, most are price-oriented such as Deals Direct. But many of our voters also underlined the first-class attention provided in the online environment. The Book Depository was often plugged as a consumer's paradise. "You can make wish lists, be emailed if a book you've put on that list comes into stock and get several bookmarks with each purchase – and everything arrives in top condition."



NUTSHELL

>> If you live in a rural or regional area, you may only have one choice of mobile provider.
 >> Some service providers now offer phone plans without a long-term contract.

STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

Upwardly mobile

If you're not happy with your current mobile plan, perhaps it's time to look past the big players for a fresh alternative.

Mobile phones are an integral part of our lives for most people – there are currently more than 22 million mobile phone subscribers in Australia, and on average we upgrade to a new handset every 18 to 24 months. It would seem reasonable to assume that such a significant communication tool should be easy to use, with great value plans and good customer support. Unfortunately, as many of us are aware, this is not always the case.

Over the years, CHOICE has given its infamous Shonky Award to various sectors of the mobile telecommunications industry, highlighting the

"I don't have a choice as my location geographically forces me to use Telstra"

frustrations mobile phone users face – with convoluted phone plans, variable network performance and multi-year contracts. So it may come as a shock to discover that we've seen fit to create an award for best value mobile phone service. However, this award is not determined by us at CHOICE, but voted for by our members – though our staff were very interested

(and slightly anxious) to know what you thought. For instance, what if CHOICE members were dissatisfied with *all* the mobile phone network providers? A distinct possibility, given the mobile network industry's performance over recent times.

Close to 7000 members rated their mobile phone network provider on a number of areas, including:

- Reception quality
- Overall quality of services
- Value for money
- Likelihood of staying with provider
- Likelihood of recommending provider
- Customer support

Of the factors we asked our members to rate, value for money and likelihood of recommending provider were used to determine



the overall best value mobile phone service, with the winner earning a level of satisfaction from its customers significantly higher than the competition.

Sticking with Telstra

It's no surprise that Telstra and Optus dominate the internet and mobile phone network space in terms of customer numbers, with Telstra being particularly strong in regional areas, and this is reflected in the figures gathered from our members. Overall, the smaller mobile phone service providers have not been able to attract customers away from Telstra, Optus and Vodafone/3. This is in stark contrast to the internet service provider (ISP) survey CHOICE conducted at the same time (see page 28) which found smaller ISPs have been able to compete effectively with Telstra and Optus.

Part of this "stickiness" – where a customer stays with a large established mobile phone service despite lower levels of overall customer satisfaction – is understandable with Telstra, given that its Next G network provides the only coverage available in some rural and regional areas. However, another reason some customers stay with their mobile phone service provider may be the perceived lack of alternatives. Though small in number, some CHOICE members have voted with their wallets and left the big three networks for some smaller mobile phone service providers, whose overall satisfaction levels are significantly higher than for the larger ones.

If you aren't happy with your current mobile plan and are off contract, sites such as phonechoice.com.au or online forums such as whirlpool.com.au provide really helpful advice about your alternatives.

SAVVY & ACTIVE

Our survey also asked CHOICE members where they go to for advice when choosing a mobile phone service. Not surprisingly, given our savvy and active membership, only a small proportion of members cite promotional material and TV advertising as having influence. Instead, they favour online forums, CHOICE Online, CHOICE magazine and friends for their information.



No ringing endorsement

Some of the survey responses we received from unhappy customers reveal a distinct feeling of discontent with the established phone networks, and some CHOICE members have made it very clear that using a particular mobile phone network provider does not mean they consider them value for money or that they're likely to recommend them to others – only that they feel they have no choice.

The survey results also showed that while some CHOICE members are likely to stay with their current provider, they won't necessarily also recommend that provider to others. Telstra rated the highest among the major mobile networks for likelihood of staying, with response rate of 82%, second only to our award winner on 88%. However, when asked whether they would recommend Telstra to someone else, only 56% of Telstra customers were prepared to do so. In stark contrast, almost all the customers of our award winner would recommend the service.

Telstra's high scores for likelihood of staying could be attributed to their wider coverage in rural and regional areas, with CHOICE members giving Telstra a reception quality score of 80% – significantly higher than any of the other providers. However, responses such as "I don't have a choice as my geographic location forces me to use Telstra" and "I have no choice because I live in a remote town" are hardly ringing endorsements. With only 30% of survey respondents living in rural areas, the need to stay with Telstra due to its wider network coverage is also likely to be an issue for metropolitan users, who may need the coverage when travelling.

Having no choice may help explain the fact that although 72% of the CHOICE members who are Telstra customers have been with the company for more than five years, and 82% were likely to stay, only a little more than half would recommend them to someone else. >

NUMBER CRUNCH

1.66m

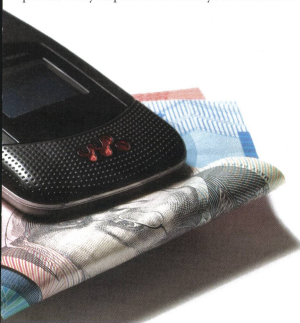
mobile numbers were ported to new mobile providers in 2010

83%

of people give their mobile phone away

3%

throw them out



TELSTRA BILLING

See page 5 of our news pages for how Telstra has changed its mobile phone billing for the worse, creating more revenue for them, but a worse deal for customers

DID YOU KNOW?

ISP satisfaction

CHOICE also surveyed members about their internet service provider (ISP) but here we did not get a clear winner. This may reflect the volatile nature of the industry, with many network providers, including the major ones, attracting criticism for the quality of service as well as their customer service. However, a group of smaller ISPs including **Internete**, **Westnet**, **Adam Internet** and **iiNet** scored consistently high for questions relating to customer support, quality of service, value for money, likelihood of staying with the ISP and recommending that ISP to someone else.

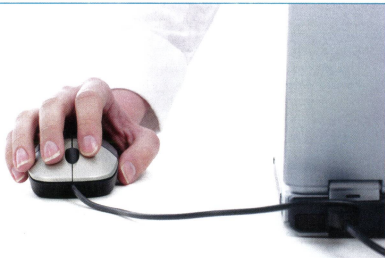
The People's CHOICE Award winner for best value mobile phone service (see below) also scored well

in most areas, although only average for customer support.

Being able to provide a full service, such as a combined landline and mobile phone plan, seems to be an effective means to gain market share, with 40% of Telstra and 25% of Optus customers citing bundle

deals as a major consideration when choosing their ISP.

As the lines between mobile phone services and mobile online access become increasingly blurred, the ability to provide a one-SIM-fits-all solution may be something to watch out for in the future.



CHOICE AWARD

AND THE WINNER IS... TPG

TPG had strong results across a range of quality of service indicators in our survey, indicating that when presented with a compelling alternative with good value and customer support, some people will vote with their feet.

Although TPG is fairly well known as an ISP, you may be surprised to know that the company has been offering mobile phone service plans for almost three years. The most telling findings of the survey are that those CHOICE

members who use TPG for their mobile phone intend staying with them and a majority have been using TPG for well over a year.

TPG is the top performer in a number of categories, including customer support, overall quality of service and likelihood of staying. For value for money and the likelihood of the customer recommending the service to others, TPG stood out as significantly superior to its nearest competitor.

No contract plans mean you can walk away from a

TPG phone plan if you're not satisfied, and although you are provided with a lower rate for bundling the mobile phone service with a TPG internet package, the charges and conditions are clearly shown on their website. However, Telstra still has the widest coverage, so check TPG's available coverage areas to ensure you will be satisfied with the network quality in your area.



STORY BRENDAN MAYS

Show us the money

Banks are willing to pay top interest for your cash in their online accounts, but which gives the most sizzle for your savings?

NUTSHELL

>> We examined 150 savings accounts and interest rates over the past 12 months to determine the best products.
>> With more than \$153 billion in transaction accounts earning little or no interest, it's time to move your money to an account that gives something back.

Competition is hot among high-interest savings accounts, and over the past two years, we have seen interest rates start to soar. This means there's no better time than now to start a regular savings plan that can see you earn serious moolah.

CHOICE examined 150 savings accounts to find the best product with no minimum balance or deposit requirements, unlimited free internet banking and the ability to be linked to any transaction account in Australia. We also looked at interest rates over the past 12 months to see who is really paying more on your investment.

Rate hunting

Many accounts offer a high introductory rate but then drop to a standard rate well below the market leaders. In the long term, a high standard rate will outperform any introductory offer, and the hassle of moving money around often prevents people switching once they've settled on a product. However, there's nothing stopping savvy savers from moving their money to take advantage of the leading rates and then switching again when a better deal comes up. The "rate hunter" scenario here illustrates would have happened if you'd been prepared to put up with the hassle of application forms and move your funds over a year to maximise interest.

Cash management

Banks pay interest on deposits because they can then lend that money to borrowers – such as people looking for a home loan – at a higher rate of interest. This is an important way banks make money, and these deposits (there are a range >

RATE HUNTER SCENARIO

Starting with a savings amount of \$5000, CHOICE examined historical market special rates (data supplied by Mozo) for 12 months from 15 February 2010. The highest special rate was chosen with the flexibility to withdraw money or exit the account at any time in mind. Savings accounts requiring a linked transaction account with the same provider (normally involving additional fees) were not considered.

Each month on the 15th, we assessed the market again. If another account offered a rate more than 0.25% higher than that already being achieved, the money was transferred (usually requiring online application or phone call to close the old account). Assuming we saved \$100 each week, further savings were also deposited on the 15th of each month. No withdrawals were made.

RATE HUNTER ACCOUNTS (SPECIAL RATES)

TOTAL
INTEREST
EARNED
\$490

Provider (listed by sequence of transferred money)	Standard interest rate at time money was in account (%)*	Special interest rate (% historical)*	Special rate duration from opening account (months)	Existing customers can access special rate if they ask	Time in account (months)	Rate hunter cumulative balance scenario/\$†
Citibank Online Saver	4.25-4.75	5.71-6.01	Six	No	Three (Feb-May)	6365.19
ING Savings Maximiser	4.90	6.25	Four	No	Three (May-Aug)	7769.68
Virgin Money Virgin Saver	5.35	6.75	Four	No	Four (Aug-Dec)	9256.26
UBank USaver	6.01	6.01-6.51	Unlimited	na	Two (Dec-Feb)	10,691.15

* Rates based on historical data from Mozo.com.au. † Providers are organised chronologically according to rate hunter – see scenario above for how we calculate. A range of historical interest rates is shown where rates have changed over the period money was in the account. No monthly or internet banking fees apply to these accounts, and no fees are applicable when closing accounts (most accounts can be closed online or over the phone). Repeat access to introductory rates may be limited by institutions.

na Not applicable – rate is available after first month with automatic savings plan, or for those aged 18-29 with balances less than \$6000 with USaver Reach.



NUTSHELL

>> With the banking industry starting to do away with transaction and account-keeping fees, low or no penalty fees became the decider for this year's CHOICE Award for Best Low-Fee Bank Account.
>> Credit unions and building societies charge more fees than banks, but are likely to offer far better customer service.

STORY ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Holding banks to account

While banks are finally starting to respond to consumer demands, how and what they charge were key criteria for choosing our award winner.

If your bank continues to slap you with monthly fees or hit you up for everyday transactions, now is a really good time to take your money elsewhere.

Since we gave out our inaugural CHOICE Award for Best Low-Fee Bank Account last year, banking CEOs everywhere seem to have gotten our message. Never before has it been easier to steer clear of transaction and account maintenance fees.

Penalty fees, however, are a different story. They're still liberally applied and, the way we see it, do not reflect the cost of dealing with the problem. Financial institutions raked in \$503 million in penalty fees from household transaction accounts in the 2008-09 financial year. In 2009-10, that figure dropped to \$465 million. The trend is promising, but we doubt it cost the banks this much to deal with overdrawn accounts or dishonoured cheques.

We're not alone in our suspicions. In fact, some lawyers are questioning whether charging so much more than it cost to fix the problem is even legal. Australia's biggest class action to date was launched last year by Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, aiming to recover up to \$400 million in penalty fees charged since 2004.

The penalty fee rort is simply greed posing as need. Our calculations indicate that the big banks were making about \$7.2 billion in interest annually on the collective transaction deposit accounts of consumers

as of December last year. Why should they be able to charge us for routine banking mishaps on top of this?

The service issue

Not getting fleeced by fees should be a priority for any bank customer, but good service also counts, especially over the long run. Many institutions that looked promising in the fee category did not fare well in CHOICE's Banking Satisfaction survey last year, particularly the big four banks.

According to the Financial Ombudsman, 96% of transaction account disputes involved banks and only 4% involved credit unions in 2008-09. Credit unions and building societies (also known as mutuals) generally charge more fees, but for some it's a fair price to pay for better customer service, as our survey found.

Service complaints are not limited to long waits on the phone or unresponsive staff. Customers have been pressured into buying financial products or misinformed about the types of accounts that best meet their needs. One recurring complaint is that banks introduce new types of accounts and reduce the interest paid on existing accounts without letting their customers know.

In general, the feedback we've received suggests banks focus more on attracting new customers than keeping existing ones.

ABACUS speaks

Louise Petschler, who runs ABACUS, the industry body representing credit unions and building societies, tells CHOICE that customer service is the industry's main advantage over banks and central to its culture.

"The difference between us and banks is the mutual structure," she says. "If you're a member of a credit union or building society, you're an owner. Our shareholding dividend has to be better service, and I would argue that we offer consistently better rates on loans and deliver better value over the long term."

According to Petschler, credit union staff frequently call members if they're about to incur a penalty fee, and often do not apply them in any case. Unlike banks, which have been known to fulfil their rate change disclosure duty through notices in the back pages of newspapers, mutuals inform members of rate changes by letter well in advance of the change.

"It's about personal service, and it's incredibly difficult for the banks to match that," says Petschler. "Mutual organisations talk to their members much more effectively. It's also about offering tailored products, making exceptions and dealing with people's personal circumstances."

Mutual standouts

Some non-bank accounts offer almost all of the ingredients of fee-free banking – including free own-bank ATM and EFTPOS transactions, and a number of other free transactions. The following two accounts missed the final cut due to over-the-counter and cheque fees, fees for having a debit card (which

amounts to a monthly fee), high penalty fees and conditions for avoiding a monthly fee.

- **Gateway Credit Union Everyday Savings Account** (\$5 per cheque written; \$5 monthly fee for Visa debit card; \$4 for over-the-counter withdrawals)
- **IMB Building Society** (\$6 monthly account-keeping fee applies if balance falls below \$2000; \$1.60 monthly fee for Visa debit card)

Conditions apply

Aside from penalty fees, some transaction accounts meet our fee-free criteria on all counts except one – not requiring a monthly deposit to maintain the no-monthly-fee status. On the other hand, Bankwest's Hero account offers an attractive interest rate for a transaction account (5% on up to \$5000). If your salary or other income is directly deposited, one of these accounts might be right for you.

- **Bankwest Hero Transaction Account:** minimum deposit of \$2000 per month
- **Bankwest Zero Transaction Account:** minimum deposit of \$2000 per month
- **St George Express Freedom:** minimum deposit of \$1000 per month
- **Westpac Choice Account:** minimum deposit of \$2000 per month
- **Commonwealth Bank Complete Access Account:** minimum deposit of \$2000 per month

Picking the winner

With more institutions getting rid of monthly maintenance fees and offering more free transactions, >

NUMBER CRUNCH

96%

The percentage of bank-related transaction account complaints to the Financial Ombudsman Service in 2008-09

4%

The percentage of credit union-related transaction account complaints to the Financial Ombudsman Service in 2008-09

YOUR STORIES

Like "chalk and cheese" is how Gold Coast resident Bruce Flick describes the customer service difference between Commonwealth and ANZ banks, where he has held accounts, and his current dealings with Heritage Building Society. "It comes down to the little things, such as getting access to people and information when you need it. Heritage offers a level of service that is not to be found with the banks."

In Bruce's experience, "banks are your best buddies when they're trying to get your business, but

when you're with them you can't get what you want when you want it."

Donna Caldwell, who ditched ANZ in favour of Community First credit union, says "when you ring the credit union, you press one button and the next thing you do is speak to an actual person. It's a lot more personal. We're not customers, we're members. It comes down to knowing people and understanding their circumstances."

Donna acknowledges that Community First and other non-banks are profit-driven, "but at the end of the day the priorities for

credit unions are not dictated by the fat cats sitting at the top".



NUMBER CRUNCH

\$7.2b

Our estimate of the amount of annual interest the major banks earned from transaction account deposits as of December 2010

\$465m

The amount collected in penalty fees by major banks on household transaction accounts in 2009-10

< penalty fees became the final checkpoint for determining this year's award. To reach the final cut, institutions had to offer transaction accounts with no monthly fees as a starting point. CHOICE assessed the overall market, including accounts from the big four banks, a number of smaller banks, and non-bank deposit takers including credit unions and building societies.

We trimmed our initial list down to accounts that offer no monthly fees without any conditions attached, such as a minimum monthly deposit or balance. From there we narrowed down further to accounts that also offer unlimited, unconditional free own-bank ATM and EFTPOS transactions. To stay on this short list, institutions also had to offer a number of other unlimited transactions at no cost, including direct debit or credit, phone and internet banking, BPAY service and over-the-counter service if available.

The final six

The accounts listed in the table below made it to the final stages of award consideration. All feature no monthly fees and unlimited, unconditional free transactions in key categories. After penalty fees were factored in, however, only two were left standing – see right. ■

CHOICE AWARD

AND THE WINNER IS... NAB

With the penalty fee filter in place, our search led to a familiar outcome, with **NAB's Classic Banking** account coming out on top and ING Direct's Orange Everyday a close second. Neither account charges penalty fees and both offer unlimited, unconditional free transactions of all types. These were also CHOICE's two top picks in 2010, and we expect they'll continue to drive the competition to get rid of unfair fees.

As with last year, choosing one account over the other came down to ATMs. For the ING account, transactions are free at any ATM, but only if you withdraw at least \$200 per transaction, which may disadvantage consumers who generally make smaller ATM withdrawals and may not want to have that much cash on hand. With Classic Banking, you can withdraw any amount at a branch or through NAB's robust ATM network, which includes rediATM. ING lacks branch access, though you can do basic transactions at Australia Post for free.

It was NAB that began the fee-free revolution, abolishing fees for overdrawn transaction accounts in July 2009 and then getting rid of monthly and credit card penalty fees the following October.

TOP SIX LOW-FEE BANK ACCOUNTS

	AMP eASY Transact	Citibank Plus transaction	NAB Classic Banking	Suncorp Everyday Basics	ING Direct Orange Everyday	Bank of Queensland Day to Day Plus
PENALTY FEES (\$)						
Account overdrawn fee per incident	18	10	0	10	0	15
Periodical payment insufficient funds fee per incident	12	9	0	10	0	15
Cheque dishonour fee (outward) per cheque	45 + daily overdraft debit interest	9	0	10	0	15
Direct debit dishonour fee per incident	40	9	0	10	0	15
Deposited cheques returned dishonoured per cheque	15	0	0	10	0	19.33
ATM NETWORKS						
	rediATM, NAB	Citibank, Westpac, St George, BankSA	NAB, rediATM	Suncorp, Bendigo	All ATM fees rebated with \$200 minimum withdrawal	Bank of Queensland, rediATM





NUTSHELL

STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

>> Two important factors to consider when buying a TV are how far you'll be sitting from it when you watch and its resolution capabilities.

>> 3D-capable TVs perform well in both 2D and 3D modes.

Digital age

As the final switchover to digital television approaches, which brand should you look to when it's time to replace your old analog TV?

Buying a TV can be a confusing process, with buzzwords such as HD3D, IPTV (internet TV) and LED all fighting for your attention.

Here, we explain the latest terms and technology, and also give you the information you need to decide not just which TV will give you the best picture and sound, but also which is best for your home. >

3D TV

After a few false starts, 3D TV is starting to deliver on its potential, with movies such as *Avatar* and the latest Pixar offerings such as *Toy Story 3* showing how good 3D can get. We comment on the quality of the 3D experience in tests, but it is not part of the overall score as people are still watching most TV and movies in 2D. However, some of the best-performing models in the past couple of tests have been 3D-capable, so they're just as good at showing regular 2D TV as a 3D Blu-ray disc.

BUYING TIPS

SIZE DOES MATTER

Don't be fooled into thinking that bigger is always better when choosing a TV. The important things to consider are the distance you're sitting from the TV when watching it, and the resolution capabilities of the TV.

Measure the screen's diagonal size (for example, a 42-inch or 106cm TV has a diagonal measurement of 106cm). Multiply this number by about three and you have a good distance from seat to screen.

You can sit closer when watching a high resolution screen (these are shown as 1080p in the tables, pages 36-38), but remember that a TV has to suit your home and lifestyle, so make sure it doesn't dominate the room.

SOUND IS STILL IMPORTANT

While picture quality has improved over the past couple of years, the latest craze for thin-panel TVs is affecting sound quality. They might look great, but the trade-off is usually poorer sound.

This will probably not be an issue for people with home theatre sound systems. However, if you want to just turn on the TV to catch the news in the morning, you'll quickly come to hate the horrible tinny speakers wedged into your super-thin screen.

If you don't have additional speakers for your TV, check our tables to find a model with good sound.



Small TVs (up to 94cm)

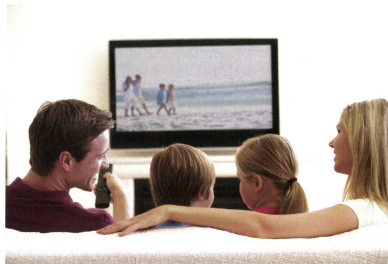
While many of us lust after a 150cm 3D monster, a small TV is often all we need for the spare bedroom, study, or in a small apartment. This size is ideal for areas where you're no more than a couple of metres away from the screen.

Important things to consider include viewing angle and sound quality. If the TV is in a room where you'll be moving around a lot, such as a kitchen, viewing angle is particularly important.

Smaller TVs are less likely to be hooked up to a sound system, so the sound in a small TV is important. Most smaller models are not particularly thin, leaving room for a set of speakers that would never fit into the latest large-screen, super-skinny models.

Screen sizes of about 94cm are ideal for a studio apartment or casual viewers who don't want the TV to dominate the room. Features such as LED backlighting are sometimes available at this size, but are not yet common.

Small TVs	Performance								Specifications				
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast picture quality score (%)	DVD picture quality score (%)	Blu-ray picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	Screen size (cm)	Backlighting type	Screen resolution (pixels)	3D-capable	Price (\$)
Panasonic TH-L32D25A	70	66	73	70	65	71	78	70	81	LED	1080p		1299
Samsung UA32C6900VFXXY	70	71	70	70	65	74	75	50	81	LED	1080p		1299
Panasonic TH-L32U20A	69	67	73	65	63	74	75	70	81	CCFL	1080p		749
Panasonic TH-L37S25A	69	68	66	70	59	72	75	80	94	CCFL	1080p		1099
Samsung UA37C5000QFXXY	69	68	60	85	67	70	80	60	94	CCFL	1080p		1199
Samsung LA37B530P7F	68	82	70	70	45	64	83	40	94	CCFL	1080p		1399
LG 32LD560	67	71	67	55	63	71	68	70	81	CCFL	1080p		999
Panasonic TH-L37V10A	67	71	65	75	40	65	80	80	94	CCFL	1080p		1799
Samsung LA37B650T1F	67	72	72	70	35	69	79	50	94	CCFL	1080p		1899
LG 37LE5310	65	64	65	55	57	72	75	80	94	CCFL	1080p		1199
Toshiba 32CV700	64	73	53	65	55	69	75	40	81	CCFL	1080p		849
LG 32LE5510	63	65	58	50	70	75	73	40	81	LED	1080p		1299
Samsung LA32C450E1DXXY	62	59	55	60	71	73	70	40	81	CCFL	720p		649
LG 37LH35FD	60	57	55	55	60	59	87	80	94	CCFL	1080p		1839
Sony KDL32EX710	59	64	47	50	65	70	80	40	81	LED	1080p		1299
LG 37LH20D	58	57	52	55	55	59	81	80	94	CCFL	720p		1494
LG 37SL80YD	58	54	52	40	65	67	80	80	94	CCFL	1080p		2414
Kogan KGNFHDLED32VAA	57	61	60	40	54	59	68	65	81	LED	1080p		799
Toshiba Regza 37AV600A	56	50	57	65	25	60	85	80	94	CCFL	720p		1349
TCL L32P11FE	49	48	39	30	62	64	75	40	81	LED	1080p		799
Sanyo LCD37XR9SDA	44	44	36	45	30	51	81	40	94	CCFL	720p		899
Kogan 108037	38	47	32	10	20	45	64	80	94	CCFL	1080p		749



Medium TVs (102cm-107cm)

More than 2,000,000 TVs were sold in Australia last year, and one out of every three was in the 102cm-107cm screen range. These are often collectively referred to as 42-inch TVs, and this screen size is large enough to enjoy HD TV and movies without dominating an average-sized room. Manufacturers often see this size as the entry point for introducing features such as LED backlighting, home networking and IPTV as well as USB and removable card support so you can enjoy movies and photos taken on your camcorder or digital camera. Plasma TVs also start to appear at this size, although LCD is by far the most common type available.

To add other devices such as a game console or DVD player, make sure the TV has multiple connections so you aren't constantly plugging in and unplugging devices.

MEDIUM TVS	PERFORMANCE								SPECIFICATIONS				
	Overall score (%)	Broadcast picture quality score (%)	DVD picture quality score (%)	Blu-ray picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	Screen size (cm)	Backlighting type	Screen resolution (pixels)	3D-capable	Price (\$)
Brand / model (in rank order)													
Samsung UA40C5000QFXXY	72	84	74	75	40	69	95	80	102	LED	1080p		1499
Sony KDL40HX800	70	68	67	80	56	71	75	80	102	LED	1080p	✓	1999
Toshiba 40RV700A	69	80	64	80	37	66	75	80	102	CCFL	1080p		1099
Samsung PS42C451B2DXXY	68	68	74	70	45	69	83	80	107	Plasma	720p		949
Samsung LA40C650L1FXXY	66	62	76	65	45	69	77	80	102	CCFL	1080p		1299
LG 42LD460	63	56	64	65	60	62	84	80	107	LED	1080p		999
LG 42LE5510	63	55	55	70	60	69	93	80	107	LED	1080p		2299
Samsung LA40B550K1F	63	64	72	70	35	62	79	70	102	CCFL	1080p		999
Sony KDL40EX500	63	61	63	65	45	67	84	80	102	CCFL	1080p		1099
Sony KDL40NX700	63	62	68	60	40	66	93	80	102	LED	1080p		2499
Sony KDL40HX700	62	65	58	55	45	67	82	80	102	CCFL	1080p		1999
Panasonic TH-P42X20A	61	52	64	60	45	68	87	80	107	Plasma	720p		879
Sony KDL40EX700	61	62	57	55	45	67	92	80	102	LED	1080p		2199
LG 42PJ350	60	46	59	60	60	69	84	80	107	Plasma	720p		749
Panasonic TH-P42V20A	60	49	62	65	50	68	80	80	107	Plasma	1080p		1299
Toshiba 40CV550A	60	63	64	80	35	51	87	70	102	CCFL	1080p		1499
Panasonic TH-L42D25A	59	52	63	60	40	67	92	60	107	LED	1080p		1699
Panasonic TH-P42U20A	58	53	53	60	45	68	84	80	107	Plasma	1080p		999
TCL L42E77DF	56	59	59	60	40	56	83	50	107	CCFL	1080p		1399
Soniq QSL400XT	54	60	54	55	20	59	68	80	102	CCFL	1080p		798
Toshiba 42XV600A	54	56	50	60	35	56	88	60	107	LED	1080p		1999
Toshiba 42ZV600A	53	56	47	60	35	56	85	60	107	LED	1080p		2299
Sharp LC40LE700X	52	50	52	40	35	56	93	80	102	LED	1080p		1699
Sharp LC42D77X	50	53	47	40	30	56	71	80	107	CCFL	1080p		1499
TCL L42P10FZ	45	41	30	60	20	60	89	60	107	LED	1080p		999
Vivo LTV42FHDQ	42	41	30	45	25	50	78	80	107	CCFL	1080p		799



Large TVs (117cm and over)

If you want to get serious about creating a home cinema experience, this is the size for you. But bear in mind, choosing a larger TV will change the look and feel of your room. Included in the large TV category are the relatively new 117cm and 119cm screens – ideal if you want a large TV but can't justify losing your lounge room to a 50 inch-plus monster panel.

All the latest technologies such as LED backlighting, 3D Blu-ray support and networking features such as wireless are common for this size.

Large TVs are ideal for a room where you sit at least three metres away from the screen, so they're good for a fairly substantial living space. While all the TVs on test can be wall mounted, some larger-screen models may be unsuitable for this as they can weigh more than 30kg.

LARGE TVS	PERFORMANCE								SPECIFICATIONS				
Brand / model (in rank order; alphabetical where equal)	Overall score (%)	Broadcast picture quality score (%)	DVD picture quality score (%)	Blu-ray picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)	Screen size (cm)	Backlighting type	Screen resolution (pixels)	3D-capable	Price (\$)
Samsung PS50C7000YF	76	79	80	80	65	70	65	90	127	Plasma	1080p	✓	2299
Samsung LA46C6501F	75	78	77	85	64	71	70	60	117	CCFL	1080p		1799
Sony KDL52LX900	75	83	74	85	64	67	80	65	132	LED	1080p	✓	4499
Samsung UA46C7000WF	73	72	78	85	45	69	78	80	117	LED	1080p	✓	3299
Samsung UA46C8000FXXY	73	78	69	90	67	68	75	50	117	LED	1080p	✓	3799
Sony KDL46EX500	72	77	70	85	67	67	73	40	117	CCFL	1080p		1499
Panasonic TH-P50X20A	71	66	73	75	64	72	75	90	127	Plasma	720p		1099
Samsung PS50C451B2DXXY	71	67	65	80	69	70	73	90	127	Plasma	720p		1149
Sony 46NX710	71	72	71	80	56	69	80	60	117	LED	1080p	✓	2499
LG 47LE7500-TA	70	78	53	80	55	72	80	70	119	LED	1080p		2299
LG 50PK750	70	66	73	65	67	72	70	90	127	Plasma	1080p		1499
Samsung UA46C6900VF	70	73	67	75	61	70	78	60	117	LED	1080p		2499
Toshiba 47XL700A	70	77	65	75	63	63	80	80	119	LED	1080p		2199
Sony KDL55EX710	69	71	63	75	62	71	85	60	140	LED	1080p		2599
LG 50PJ350	68	59	71	70	68	71	70	90	127	Plasma	720p		999
Panasonic TH-P50VT20A	68	65	67	70	59	72	70	90	127	Plasma	1080p	✓	2399
Sharp LC46LE820X	66	71	58	75	60	61	80	60	117	LED	1080p		2299
LG 47LE5310	65	60	66	60	57	72	80	80	119	LED	1080p		1999
TCL L46P11FZE	65	66	64	75	44	60	85	70	117	LED	1080p		1650
Sanyo LCD-46XR10F	64	75	63	60	56	58	63	70	117	CCFL	1080p		1499
LG 52LD560	63	60	59	65	63	72	75	40	132	CCFL	1080p		1899
Sony KDL46NX700	63	59	62	65	62	68	80	40	117	LED	1080p		3099
LG 47LX9500-TA	60	63	50	50	53	68	78	70	119	LED	1080p	✓	3099
Panasonic TH-P46U20A	60	56	54	40	58	72	75	95	117	Plasma	1080p		1199
Sharp LC-46LE700X	59	63	50	65	46	55	80	85	119	CCFL	1080p		1999
Kogan KGN1080P46VAB	49	62	35	40	29	55	63	60	117	LED	1080p		1450

HOW WE TEST

Picture Our testers set up TVs of a similar size in our test lab and adjust them to get the best picture possible. The lighting is kept low and the sound muted, and three experts watch a variety of footage (HD broadcast TV, DVD movie, Blu-ray and a computer game) simultaneously on all the screens. They evaluate the picture quality and rate it out of 10 for each type of footage. Each TV is checked for colour accuracy and solid blacks and whites without a colour shift. A number of test patterns are displayed to see if part of the picture is cut off. The testers play movies and other footage to check the screen's ability to produce images without colour-banding, jerkiness, blurring or vibration. They also check for colour bleed in high contrast or intensely saturated parts of the image, and that there are no trails behind fast-moving objects on the screen.

Sound The testers listen to movies and music to check for rattles, hums, hisses or distortion, as well as how well the high and low sounds are produced.

Ease of use The remote control, front panel controls and on-screen display are all used to perform a number of common tasks such as changing channels and volume, setting up favourites and re-scanning channels.

The testers look for logical menus and clear labelling and buttons and controls that are easily identified and can be used without interfering with other controls.

Energy score Our testers calculate a score based on the star rating.

BUYING TIPS

Most small and medium-sized LCD TVs have a CCFL (cold cathode fluorescent lamp) backlight. This is a reasonably efficient light source, but the backlight remains evenly lit across the panel regardless of what's on the screen. This can make it more difficult to get a good black, because a small amount of light always tends to leak past the LCD.

From our testing, LED (light emitting diode) lighting uses less power. It can also vary the light intensity very quickly so light levels can be reduced in dark scenes, producing better black levels.

LED TVs come in two forms:

- **Sidelit LED**, where the light source comes from an array of LEDs around the screen. This is the less expensive option, and can struggle with evenness of lighting and viewing angles.
- **Backlit LED** is where there are LEDs across the back of the screen. Manufacturers claim this produces a better picture quality, but we have not tested enough models to conclude one way or the other.

Many were predicting the death of plasma technology, but the past year has seen a resurgence in plasma TV sales, especially for larger models. Their high refresh rate (also known as sub-field rate) provides good performance, particularly for fast-motion and action scenes.

Many people were predicting the death of plasma technology, but last year saw a resurgence in plasma TV sales

CHOICE AWARD

AND THE WINNER IS... Samsung

This award was based on three factors: the average score of all TVs we tested for each brand, the percentage of models that made our What to Buy list, and each brand's appliance reliability score.

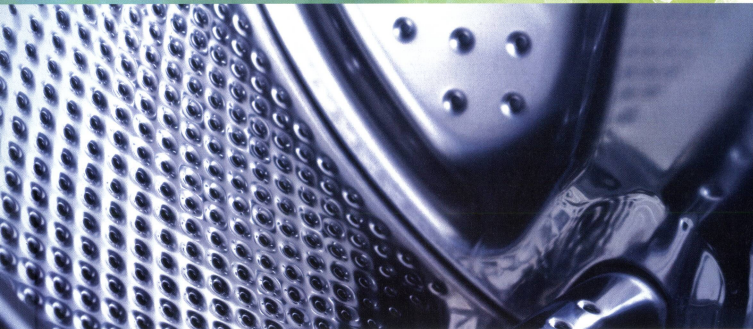
The strongest performers in TVs across all screen sizes and price points are Panasonic, Sony and

Samsung. All three brands consistently appeared at the top of the table for overall performance in the labs and satisfaction among CHOICE members.

Of the three, this year the Samsung has been the standout, releasing a series of quality models catering for the buyer wanting a small TV in the study, right

up to 150cm-plus panels providing the full home cinema experience.

Samsung has not been making TVs for as long as established Japanese manufacturers Sony and Panasonic, but the South Korean brand's range of TVs have performed well and been regulars in our What to Buy lists.



NUTSHELL

>> The way in which people use their washing machines differs substantially from how the Australian Standard calls for them to be tested.
>> Performance with a partial load depends on whether you have a front or top loader.

STORY MATTHEW STEEN

Not up to standard

Australians are washing less than a full load in their washing machines, calling into question the standards used to test.

CHOICE testing reflects the way products are used in real life, and we've been looking into how Australians use their washing machines for some time now. Back in 2007, we changed our method to test with cold water because 70% of Australians wash this way, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. We confirmed this with a survey of

our subscribers and an in-house test. Despite this, the Australian Standard still calls for a warm wash.

The gap between how washing machines are tested and how they're used in real life calls into question the standard's relevance. CHOICE would like to see it changed to better reflect how Australians use their washing machines now – not 20 years ago.

WHAT TO BUY

The **Asko Quattro W6903** makes our recommended list in this round of testing. For profiles of other models listed, see *CHOICE* August 2010, March 2010, August 2009, March 2009, September 2008 or March 2007. For back issues, call CHOICE on **1800 069 552**.

SMALL (UP TO 5.5KG)

Fisher & Paykel MW512 (tp) [Mar 07] \$649

MEDIUM (6KG-7KG)

Asko Quattro W6903 (fr) \$2399
Asko Eco Quattro W6883 (fr) [Aug 10] \$2099
Asko Quattro W6443 (fr) [Aug 10] \$1599
Miele Honeycomb Care W3725 (fr) (Sept 08) \$2199

Electrolux Time Manager EWF1074 (fr) [Aug 09] \$899
Miele W1611 (fr) [Mar 10]  \$1699

LARGE (7.5KG OR LARGER)

LG Inverter Direct Drive WD 14030D (fr) [Mar 10] \$1499
Electrolux Time Manager EWF1083 (fr) [Aug 09] \$1059
Bosch Logixx 8 WAS28440AU (fr) [Mar 09] \$2149

(fr) = Front loader

(tp) = Top loader

A Best Buy is a top performer with a good reliability rating that also costs less to buy and run. The Electrolux brands don't make it into the Best Buy category because of their lower reliability scores [See *CHOICE*, March 2011, page 14].

Load size

We've also observed that people put fewer clothes into their machine. The Australian Standard calls for a full load to be tested, but a few years ago we discovered consumers only place about half a load into their washers. Numbers from one major manufacturer confirm our findings, with data downloaded from serviced machines showing an average load of 2.7kg, regardless of the capacity of the washing machine. Another major manufacturer carried out a survey of more than 3000 washes, which showed that the average load was 3.2kg regardless of the capacity of the washer. An online CHOICE survey confirmed our members use about 4kg per load on average.

In light of these results, we believe Standards Australia should change how washers are tested. However, despite lobbying them some years ago to conduct a wider trial, we've seen little action. It's complacent of Standards Australia to continue with a standard that is no longer relevant, and we want that to change.

Performance and load

Since Australians are changing the way that they use their washers, CHOICE conducted a pilot test of the newly tested machines with a 3.5kg partial load in addition to the full load the standard requires. We found differences in performance between top-loader and front-loader machines in the partial-load tests. Dirt removal improved for front loaders, but was worse for most top loaders. Rinse performance improved for all machines, with substantially improved scores for most front loaders. Gentleness scores improved for top loaders, but were marginally worse for all front loaders. Spin and water efficiency became worse for almost all machines, although many top loaders had substantially worse results for water efficiency. Cycle times and running costs tended to decrease for both types of machines with a partial load.

To find out what capacity machine you need to buy, weigh your clothes each time you make up a load and average it out over a few loads. If manufacturers added a feature that showed the weight as you filled the machine with clothes, it would help you calculate how much you put into your washer. >

MISSING MODELS

CHOICE has tested so many washing machines they can't all fit in our publication table, so we've removed some models that have been discontinued (although they may be available in some stores), as well as some models that don't perform well overall. See CHOICE, March 2010, page 64, for more.

WHAT TO BUY

MEDIUM (6KG - 7KG)

77% Asko Quattro W6903*

PRICE \$2399

GOOD POINTS

- Very good rinse performance and spin efficiency.
- Auto-sensing water level.
- Out-of-balance correction.
- Selectable spin speed.
- Woolens wash including hand wash.
- Fast wash.
- Extra rinse option.

BAD POINTS

- Only OK water efficiency.

* Fully integrated.



ABOUT THE REST

6KG-7KG

The **Simpson 365605N** has good water efficiency and a short program time, but is let down by only OK scores for dirt removal, gentleness and spin efficiency.

7.5KG OR LARGER

The **Simpson Ezi Set 950 22S950M** and **Fisher & Paykel IW812** have good overall scores and very good rinse performance, but both are let down by borderline gentleness scores. The IW812 has more features than the 22S950M, as well as a shorter program time.

Both the **Siemens WM14S440AU** and **Samsung WF8750LSW** have good gentleness and spin scores, and very good water efficiency, but the Siemens' dirt removal score is not great, while the Samsung is only borderline for rinse performance.

All three remaining front loaders, the **Whirlpool WFS1073CD**, **LG WD13020D** and **Haier HWM1480GFL**, have good gentleness and very good water efficiency scores, but for all three, rinse performance is poor or borderline. The Whirlpool model cannot do a true cold wash.

The **LG WT-H755** has a very good rinse performance and a short program time, but only OK scores for everything else.

HOW WE TEST & RELIABILITY

See CHOICE, August 2009, page 44, to see how we test washing machines, and CHOICE, March 2011, page 14 for the results of our latest reliability survey, or go to www.choice.com.au/appliancere liability

To take advantage of less expensive hot water systems such as solar, look for a machine with hot and cold water connection

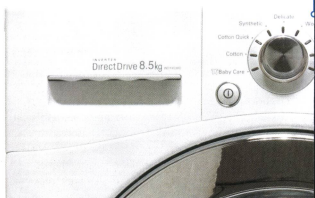
WHAT TO LOOK FOR

For complete information on what to look for when buying a washing machine, go to www.choice.com.au/washers. Some features listed in the tables (below and page 44) are explained here.

Woolens cycle (machine/hand washable) programs relate to the instructions on the garment itself, advising whether it's machine washable or for hand wash only. Washers with a tick for hand wash claim this program is gentle enough for hand wash only items.

Out-of-balance correction automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or taking in more water (which is what most top loaders do). If you're concerned about high water use, opt for a machine without this feature or buy a front loader – these are less likely to go out of balance than top loaders.

Selectable spin speed allows you to change the spin speed on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in drier clothes (good when using a dryer), while a lower speed is for delicates or fabrics that crease easily.



PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE									
		Type	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Rinse performance score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Water used (L, normal cycle)	Cycle time (min, normal wash)	Noise (dB)
UP TO 5.5KG	Brand / model (in rank order within groups)										
	Fisher & Paykel MW512	Top / agitator	72	79	90	53	52	69	132	44	6
	LG Fuzzy Logic WF-T556	Top / impeller	67	68	83	66	57	48	118	58	5
	Haier HWMF50F	Top / impeller	66 (E)	80	94	47	48	50	130	83	6
	Samsung SW50USP	Top / impeller	66	66	94	68	40	47	151	57	6
	LG WF-T507	Top / impeller	64	67	82	59	47	47	134	63	5
6KG-7KG	Simpson Ezi Set 550 36S550N	Top / agitator	64	61	63	68	71	57	81	47	5
	# Asko Quattro W6903	Front	77	76	89	73	68	80	96	148	6
	Asko Eco Quattro W6883	Front	76	71	88	76	70	83	91	152	7
	Asko Quattro W6443	Front	75	72	89	75	67	75	99	114	7
	Miele Honeycomb Care W3725	Front	75 (E)	81	65	76	85	79	50	112	6
	Electrolux Time Manager EWF1074	Front	74 (E)	75	79	76	80	68	69	126	6
	Miele W1611	Front	73 (E)	77	66	75	84	73	53	112	6
	Fisher & Paykel AquaSmart WL70T60C (A)	Top / impeller	71	80	58	57	81	67	66	58	5
	Miele Honeycomb Care W3831 WPS	Front	70 (E)	71	60	73	85	78	50	111	6
	Miele Honeycomb Care W3933	Front	70 (E)	74	58	69	85	80	49	112	5
	Bosch Maxx WAE22460AU (B)	Front	69	61	68	79	82	72	64	77	6
	Fisher & Paykel Intuitive IW 712	Top / agitator	69	72	86	54	56	67	154	51	6
	Fisher & Paykel WH70F60W3	Front	68	65	49	77	85	75	53	113	6
	Simpson Ezi Sensor SWT605SA	Top / agitator	68	76	70	44	76	56	72	68	6
	Ariston ARF105	Front	65	69	36	75	84	61	58	136	6
	# Simpson 36S605N	Top / agitator	62	58	66	57	72	58	84	47	5
	Haier HWM1070KFL	Front	61	59	30	77	87	69	47	131	6
	LG Inverter DirectDrive WD11020D	Front	57	53	13	78	90	75	35	132	6



Auto-sensing water level saves water, energy and time by automatically adjusting the water level according to the load and/or fabric type. Some machines also adjust the washing action.

Extra rinse can be useful for people sensitive to detergents, as it adds an extra rinse stage to the washing program.

Tap connection If you only have a cold water tap in your laundry, choosing a front loader means you can still wash in warm or hot water when needed, as the machine will heat the water itself. If you want to take advantage of less expensive hot water systems, such as solar, look for a hot and cold water connection machine – but be aware that most front loaders with hot and cold connection only draw hot water when the wash temperature is set to 60°C. See *CHOICE*, March 2010, page 60, for more on this.

USING THE TABLES

Scores The overall score is made up of: Dirt removal: 40%; Rinse performance: 20%; Gentleness: 15%; Water efficiency: 15%; Spin efficiency: 10%.

Cold wash penalty As the majority of Australians now wash in cold water straight from the tap, we have applied a small penalty in our overall score to models that cannot do a proper cold wash (at about 20°C) on the normal cycle. While the higher wash temperature may slightly increase a machine's scores for dirt removal and rinse effectiveness, it also means it's using more energy than it would if it were able to do a true cold wash. Our penalty compensates for this.

Dirt removal More accurate than the human eye, a spectrophotometer is used to measure this – differences of about 6% are visible.

Features See What to Look For, left, for details.

Tap connection Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate. Others connect to cold water only and may need a special connector or sealing cap for the hot water inlet. A machine with a heater (front loaders only) can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm or hot wash. But a dual connection front loader connected to solar hot water can be more efficient when doing warm or hot washes.

Dimensions are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer.

Running costs This is an estimate of how much your washer will cost in water and electricity use over 10 years if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a normal cycle, based on 20c/kWh of electricity and \$1.50 per 1000L for water. It also includes electricity used when the machine is connected to a power source but not in use. It does not include detergent. We have recalculated the water and energy costs since our last test, in line with increased costs nationally over the past few years.

Price Recommended or average retail, as of January 2011.

TABLE NOTES

■ Newly tested models.

■ Cold = cold tap water (20°C).

■ Not stated.

(A) We've received feedback about the Fisher & Paykel AquaSmart models leaving detergent residue and lint on clothes, particularly in hard water areas. Our rinse test only measures the soluble component of detergent left in the clothes, so we didn't see this. For more details, see *CHOICE*, September 2008, page 42.

(B) Available in Victoria, Tasmania, SA and Queensland. This machine was also tested using the intensive option, which the manufacturer recommends using when washing a full load. While this option improves the dirt removal, the time taken to complete a run is significantly increased. Scores are: Overall 74%; Dirt removal 74%; Rinse performance 69%; Gentleness 72%; Water efficiency 81%; Spin efficiency 74%; Water used: 65.1L; Cycle time: 158 minutes.

(C – see page 44) The manufacturer recommends using the intensive button for a full load. Using this option will most likely improve the dirt removal and overall score, but time will also be increased.

(D – see page 44) The Whirlpool GALSRT244MW3 is a similar model (\$1049) and scores the same as the GALSQB000MW3, but does not have an extra rinse cycle.

(E) Penalty applied because the machine cannot do a cold wash – see Cold Wash Penalty, above.

(F – see page 44) Even though machine has a "cold" wash, this cycle uses hot water and reaches a temperature of 24°C.

FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS			COSTS	
Machine / brand (washable)	Out-of-balance correction	Selectable spin speed	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Tap connection	Coldest wash temperature for normal wash (°C)*	Capacity (kg)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact	Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)
✓	✓	✓			H & C, C	Cold	5.5	105 x 56 x 56	fp.com.au	820	649
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	5.5	91 x 54 x 54	lge.com.au	725	649
✓	✓		✓		H & C	35	5	89 x 53 x 52	haierlife.com.au	1560	499
✓	✓		✓	✓	H & C, C	Cold	5	86 x 54 x 56	samsung.com.au	900	549
✓	✓		✓		H & C	Cold	5	85 x 54 x 54	lge.com.au	840	549
✓	✓				H & C	Cold	5.5	115 x 60 x 64	simpson.com.au	545	689
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	6	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au	694	2399
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	6	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au	656	2099
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	6	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au	700	1599
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	30	6.5	85 x 60 x 58	miele.com.au	496	2199
✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	30	7	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au	660	899
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	30	6.5	85 x 60 x 63	miele.com.au	518	1699
✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	7	102 x 60 x 60	fp.com.au	485	1079
✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	30	6.5	85 x 60 x 58	miele.com.au	459	2499
✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	30	6.5	85 x 60 x 58	miele.com.au	491	3199
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 59	bosch.com.au	479	1799
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	7	105 x 60 x 60	fp.com.au	982	919
✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7	84 x 60 x 54	fp.com.au	469	909
✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	6	103 x 58 x 63	simpson.com.au	498	799
✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 53	aristonbrand.com	532	799
✓	✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	6	103 x 58 x 63	simpson.com.au	556	739
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H or C	Cold	7	84 x 60 x 61	haierlife.com.au	365	799
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	7	85 x 60 x 55	lge.com.au	293	899

After several years of consistently high performance, Miele takes out the CHOICE Award for Best Washing Machine brand

ACCESSIBILITY

CHOICE assessed the suitability of the newly tested washing machines for people with disabilities using Independent Living Centre guidelines.

- **For wheelchair users or people with back pain** Any front loader off the floor is easiest to use. All front loaders on test are relatively easy to open and reach into – the Siemens WM14S440AU is particularly easy to use.
- **For people with upper limb dysfunction or weakness** The Siemens WM14S440AU, LG WD13020D and Samsung WF8750LSW are recommended.
- **For those with vision impairment** Both the Simpson models and the LG WD13020D are recommended.
- **For those with cognitive impairment** Both Simpson models are simple to operate.

SERVICE ISSUES

CHOICE buys a large number of washing machines each year, so we're bound to get a dud now and then. When the **Simpson Ezi Set 950 22S950M** model refused to wash a full load, we called the Electrolux service department (Electrolux owns the Simpson brand). The service showed the washer has the same electronics as many others, but was programmed for the wrong size.



Once the problem was fixed, we included the Simpson in the test. CHOICE strongly recommends that anyone who buys this machine ensures it can wash a full load, and contacts Electrolux if it cannot.

PRODUCT			PERFORMANCE									
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Type	Overall score (%)	Dirt removal score (%)	Rinse performance score (%)	Gentleness score (%)	Water efficiency score (%)	Spin efficiency score (%)	Water used (L, normal cycle)	Cycle time (min, normal wash)	Miele (2011)		
7.5KG OR LARGER	LG Inverter Direct Drive WD14030D	Front	80	81	76	79	84	81	70	194	6	
	Electrolux Time Manager EWF1083	Front	76	79	71	74	83	71	68	111	6	
	Fisher & Paykel AquaSmart WL80T65CW1 (A)	Top / impeller	75	81	74	58	81	74	76	58	6	
	Bosch Logixx 8 WAS28440AU (C)	Front	74	67	83	76	78	75	87	73	6	
	Electrolux Time Manager EWF1481	Front	73	72	59	74	86	83	55	93	6	
	Fisher & Paykel WH80F60W2	Front	72	71	63	76	83	73	68	111	6	
	LG Direct Drive WD12020D	Front	72	74	49	74	87	81	50	141	6	
	# Simpson Ezi Set 950 22S950M	Top / agitator	72	76	87	47	69	67	148	81	6	
	# Siemens WM14S440AU	Front	71	61	79	76	80	75	81	75	6	
	V-Zug Adora SLQ	Front	71	59	74	79	81	82	77	84	5	
	Fisher & Paykel WA75T65GW1	Top / agitator	70	75	89	49	52	68	179	50	5	
	# Fisher & Paykel IW812	Top / agitator	70	74	89	48	54	70	183	55	6	
	# Samsung WF8750LSW	Front	70	73	50	73	83	70	64	123	5	
	Whirlpool 6ALSQ8000MW3 (D)	Top / agitator	70 (E)	78	86	55	58	53	157	47	6	
	Whirlpool WFE1485BD	Front	70	65	68	72	79	78	89	127	6	
	Ariston Aquatilis AQXXD 149H	Front	69	71	46	74	86	78	58	116	6	
	LG Turbodrum DD WT-R107	Top / impeller	69	70	84	57	65	62	174	66	5	
	Simpson Ezi Sensor SWT802SA	Top / agitator	69	76	67	50	79	63	85	71	6	
	# LG WT-H755	Top / impeller	67	62	84	66	62	57	143	57	5	
	Samsung WF8802RPF	Front	67	64	55	71	83	71	67	124	6	
	Haier HWMP95TL	Top / impeller	66	72	66	53	73	54	127	84	5	
	# Whirlpool WFS1073CD	Front	65 (E)	69	46	75	84	66	59	152	6	
	# LG WD13020D	Front	64	60	36	76	88	79	43	146	6	
	# Haier HWM1480GFL	Front	62	60	30	78	87	70	51	103	6	

CHOICE AWARD

AND THE WINNER IS... Miele

After several years of consistently high performance, Miele takes out a CHOICE Award.

CHOICE testing ensures our members can find the best possible products. Miele has performed towards the top of our washing machine tests over the past couple of years, so we felt it was

time to recognise that they consistently deliver a good product. We've tested many Miele models over the past few years, and they always deliver good results in the 6kg-7kg category.

To choose a winner, we used the scores from our test results and reliability survey (see CHOICE, March 2011, page 14), taking into

account how often brands were recommended in our What to Buy section. Miele came out just ahead of Asko, with Bosch in third place. Miele has maintained an average score of about 72% in our washer tables over about the past 18 months, and our reliability survey shows an excellent score of 91% from respondents.

FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS				COSTS	
(machine / hand washable)	Out-of-balance correction	Selectable spin speed	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Tap connection	Coldest wash temperature for normal wash (°C)*	Capacity (kg)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Contact	Running costs (\$ / 10 years)	Price (\$)
✓		✓			H & C	Cold	8.5	85 x 60 x 68	lge.com.au	699	1499
	✓	✓		✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au	584	1059
	✓	✓			H & C	Cold	8	105 x 65 x 65	fp.com.au	536	1189
	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8	84 x 60 x 59	bosch.com.au	623	2149
✓	✓	✓		✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 63	electrolux.com.au	490	1529
	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8	84 x 60 x 59	fp.com.au	544	1059
			✓	✓	H & C	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 55	lge.com.au	421	999
			✓	✓	H & C	Cold	9.5	115 x 70 x 73	simpson.com.au	954	1059
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 59	siemens.com.au	576	2149
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 60	vzug.com.au	571	4290
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	7.5	105 x 65 x 65	fp.com.au	1111	879
	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	8	105 x 65 x 65	fp.com.au	1151	1029
	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 60	samsung.com.au	511	899
				✓	H & C	Cold (F)	7.5	109 x 69 x 68	whirlpool.com.au	1542	1099
	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8.5	85 x 60 x 60	whirlpool.com.au	679	1199
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	Cold	8.5	105 x 60 x 65	aristonbrand.com	473	2299
		✓			H & C	Cold	10	110 x 69 x 72	lge.com.au	1067	1499
	✓		✓		H & C	Cold	8	120 x 70 x 73	simpson.com.au	591	1009
	✓		✓	✓	H & C	Cold	7.5	100 x 62 x 64	lge.com.au	852	1029
		✓		✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 60	samsung.com.au	523	1299
					H & C	Cold	9.5	111 x 69 x 69	haierlife.com.au	925	899
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H & C	30	7.5	85 x 60 x 62	whirlpool.com.au	772	799
	✓	✓	✓		H & C	Cold	7.5	85 x 60 x 55	lge.com.au	371	1099
	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	Cold	8	85 x 60 x 65	haierlife.com.au	407	651



**CHOICE
ONLINE**

For profiles, and to compare all washing machines on test, go to www.choice.com.au/washers



NUTSHELL STORY EMILY MCCLUSKEY

>> In 2007, CHOICE called for hygiene inspection reports to be made public, nationally and consistently.

>> Some organisations have taken up the mantle with local scores on doors schemes.

Score those doors

Food safety is vital for consumers, and some organisations are making sure people know which businesses are safest for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Going out for a Saturday morning breakfast at a local café or getting Chinese takeaway for dinner is something most of us look forward to – but do you ever stop to think about what has happened to the food behind the scenes before it arrives on your plate?

Cockroaches in flour, rodents given free rein, cooked chickens allowed to sit out for 14 hours, mould and accumulated waste – these are just some of the infringements that environmental health officers (EHOs) find in restaurants and kitchens. Some have even been found at well-known chains. Consumers are largely left in the dark when it comes to food safety, so you can't make an informed choice about where you eat.

In 2007, CHOICE called for hygiene inspection reports to be made public, nationally and consistently. Some councils and authorities have taken up the mantle and are working to make choosing a safe place to eat as easy as choosing something from a menu. They are the true trailblazers when it comes to transparency in food hygiene, putting scores on doors for all to see. We took a closer look at these schemes to find out what a national program should look like.

Leading the way

Scores on doors-style schemes have been used increasingly overseas,

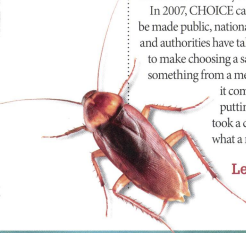
and in Australia since 1995. CHOICE identified eight different ones run by councils and organisations across the country: Manly and Canada Bay councils, and the Food Authority in NSW, Brisbane City Council in Queensland, Whitehorse City and Glen Eira City councils in Victoria, and Charles Sturt and Salisbury councils in SA.

The premise behind these schemes is to turn the score given to businesses after a council inspection into a rating that consumers can use to identify how clean that business is. For example, a business that meets minimum legal requirements for food safety might be awarded three stars, like a hotel, or perhaps an A grade, like on a school report card. This would be displayed in store for all to see.

Why a national scheme?

As it stands, each council running a restaurant hygiene scheme uses its own system. A five-star rating in one may be equal to a three-star rating in another, while three stars might be an A rating somewhere else – all pretty confusing if you are outside your local area or interstate. A national scheme would mean that, no matter where you were, you could make an informed decision about a safe place to eat and the rating would mean the same thing wherever you went.

As long as the schemes are run by councils they're not mandatory; so only businesses that opt in need to display their rating. And they're able to opt out if they don't like



that rating. Last year we came a step closer to a more widely used scheme with the announcement of a voluntary system for NSW. The NSW Food Authority recently finished its pilot program, so we're waiting to see what happens next.

What would a national scheme look like?

While all the schemes we looked at are a step in the right direction, none is perfect and some perform better than others in key areas. Members of the CHOICE food team put their heads together to assess each one thoroughly, focusing on three areas – how the schemes work, amount of information provided to consumers and how it is conveyed, and whether they encourage and reward those businesses that go above and beyond what is legally required.

How the schemes work

The intricacies of how these schemes run and the administration required can make or break it. Under this category we looked at four different areas:

Inspection process All the schemes we looked at have integrated the rating into the regular inspection process, so it poses no further burden. This approach also keeps costs down for organisations on a tight budget.

Who did it best? All did this well. A scheme that is easily integrated into regular processes is what CHOICE would like to see running nationally.

Inspection frequency How often premises are checked is vital. A lot can change very quickly, so an annual check-up is needed at least. All schemes inspect at least yearly except Brisbane City, which inspects the highest rated less frequently, and Canada Bay and Manly, which inspect every six months.

Who did it best? Canada Bay and Manly, which go above and beyond the minimum. We support inspections at least once every 12 months, with further check-ups for poor performers.

Inspection template How businesses are assessed is also an important factor, and something that varies greatly between the councils. While all have to meet the same basic benchmarks as outlined in the Food Standards Code and state legislation, different approaches leads to varying levels of subjectivity. Some councils, such as Canada Bay and Charles Sturt, use a black and white tick-box approach, while Manly and Whitehorse City councils give a numerical score that is weighted according to risk – meaning food allowed to sit in a balmy 25 degrees earns more demerits than a couple of chipped tiles.

Who did it best? Manly, Whitehorse City, Brisbane City and the NSW Food Authority. While Canada Bay sees the simplicity of their template as a strength, CHOICE believes the detailed approach creates a less subjective score.

Compliance history Three schemes take business track record into consideration. If they have had any serious breaches, caused anyone to jump on the porcelain bus or go to hospital in the past 12 months, they can't achieve a high rating. They then have to earn back their right to a top score by maintaining high standards. For other schemes, the assessment is more a snapshot of the moment the EHO visits.

Who did it best? Brisbane, Glen Eira and Whitehorse city councils. We believe taking history into consideration encourages businesses to maintain high standards all the time.

Encouraging and rewarding best practice

Rewards businesses that go above and beyond This is one of the most important parts of any scheme – what the standards are and how this is reflected in the rating.

In some councils, all that is required to achieve the highest rating is meeting the minimum requirements set out in legislation. If we want our food to be handled and prepared safely in the best possible way, a best practice approach should be taken. The Canada Bay, Brisbane City and Salisbury schemes award three stars (out of five) for meeting >

All the schemes we looked at are a step in the right direction, but some perform better than others in key areas

INTERNATIONAL SCHEMES

The proof is in the pudding – literally

Los Angeles, California, launched a scores-on-doors program, which has been running since 1998. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in hospitalisations due to food poisoning – showing how schemes such as these can boost standards and make food safer.

Also in the US, the New York City Health Department began a mandatory program in July 2010. Preliminary results suggest that this has had a big impact on the food safety standards in the city. Of the 10,000 restaurants assessed, 87% received either an A or B grade.

More than 200 local authorities

in the UK run similar programs. Like Australia, they all run differently. At present, the UK Food Standards Agency is working on a national scheme.

These schemes have proven their worth. A national scheme here would make food safer and put power to choose back in the hands of consumers.



No scheme, no matter how well designed, is going to work unless consumers know about it and understand what it's about

< legislation, but to achieve a high grade a food safety program is required. While it sounds like a lot of work, it's what is needed to maintain high standards. Victoria is currently the only state that requires a food safety program by law.

Who did it best? Brisbane City, Canada Bay and Salisbury. We want a national scheme where higher ratings, such as four or five stars, are above and beyond basic requirements.

Council goes above and beyond If we expect our food businesses to strive towards excellent food hygiene practices, it's reasonable to expect the councils do the same.

Some schemes provide incentives and rewards to high achievers that encourage others to follow suit. Brisbane City has an incentive program in place where four- and five-star rated businesses get discounts on their annual licence fees and also receive marketing opportunities. Canada Bay has an Eat Out Week once a month. A selection of four- and five-star businesses are invited to be listed in a "food passport" with special offers for diners.

Who did it best? Brisbane City, Canada Bay and Glen Eira City. Promotion encourages good results and is an effective way of providing more information for consumers.

Training, materials and support If we expect our businesses to be up to scratch, they are going to need a helping hand.

Some councils already provide training workshops for food handlers – an essential for any employee – that are recognised by their schemes. Some even provide free information booklets and educational materials. What sets some councils apart from the rest is by providing staff training logs, temperature control logs, cleaning schedules and food monitoring records for businesses to use.

Who did it best? Brisbane City, Canada Bay and Glen Eira. Support for businesses to achieve best practice in food safety is vital to a successful scheme.

Consumer information

No scheme, no matter how well designed, will work unless consumers know about and understand it. To make a scheme consumer friendly, information needs to be freely available.

Pamphlets, brochures and certificates should be available in store and from the council, so consumers have information when and where it matters. Most provide pamphlets and brochures explaining what the scheme is and what the ratings mean. An important part is providing a certificate or sticker for businesses to display, so consumers know what to look for. Including information on what the rating means adds further value.

Who did it best? Charles Sturt, Manly, Brisbane City, Canada Bay and the NSW Food Authority. Any business that meets legislative requirements or achieves higher should receive a certificate or sticker to display, and provide information directly to consumers.

Information on council websites If a council is running a program you would expect it to appear on their website, but this is not always the case.

A consumer should be able to go online and find information about the scheme. A list of businesses involved in the program and their ratings should also be available. All schemes except the NSW Food Authority and Whitehorse City Council have this. Brisbane City Council goes one better than a list, with a fully interactive search feature. Going to a particular suburb for dinner? Just type the suburb name or postcode and it will return all the rated businesses in the area.

Who did it best? Brisbane City, Canada Bay, Manly, Salisbury, Charles Sturt and Glen Eira City. Information should be easily accessible online with a listing of businesses and their ratings. A database that is searchable and updated regularly is ideal. ■



CHOICE AWARD

AND THE WINNER IS... Canada Bay Council

Looking at how each scheme performs, two councils clearly stand out – Brisbane City and Canada Bay. Brisbane ticks almost all the boxes, except that they inspect less than annually. Four- and five-star businesses are required to

do self-checks, and a random sample are inspected yearly, but there's no guarantee any one business will be visited. Poor performers are the only ones to get six-monthly inspections.

So the award goes to **Canada Bay Council**, which

ticks most boxes. They have a great consumer awareness program, encourage and reward best practice, and generally run it in a way that could provide the template for a national scheme.



**CHOICE
ONLINE**

Go to **www.choice.com.au** or **scorethosedoors** to join our campaign for a national scheme.

Lab tests

Home entertainment, whitegoods, household and personal appliances – they're all on test here.

MINI
HI-FIS
PAGE 59

James Thomson
testing mini hi-fi
systems in the
CHOICE Labs.



Inside

50 Digital radios



66 Car & motorbike
GPS



Plus

54 Fridges

59 Mini hi-fis with
iPod dock

62 Gas cooktops

70 Digital cameras

Online testing

> **High chairs** We've added 15 booster and clip-on models to our high chairs test. Check out the results at www.choice.com.au/highchairs

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories where our experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian Standards, and we develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE SHOPPER For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

CHOICE ONLINE / CHOICE VIDEO When you see one of these headings, there is more information about this story at www.choice.com.au.

CHOICE BEST BUY Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every product test report includes Best Buys.

BEST
BUY

CHOICE GREEN BUY Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.

GREEN
BUY



NUTSHELL

>> Pocket digital radios generally have good sound through supplied earphones, but most of their benchtop counterparts are disappointing. >> Solar power is not a gimmick – it extends your battery charge when using your radio outdoors.

STORY CHRIS RUGGLES

Sounding off

Lower-priced digital radios can sound cheap.

Digital broadcasting can deliver better sound quality than AM or FM. But highly compressed broadcasts from radio stations, poor reception and a radio that's just not up to the job can make digital sound no better than an analog radio. You can't do much about the first two problems, but buying a digital radio with poor sound is simply a waste of money.

CHOICE put 12 relatively inexpensive benchtop models and five pocket models through their paces.

Of the benchtop models, only the Bush BR20DAB has good sound, but it uses more than 2W on standby, which drops its score below our What to Buy cut-off (see page 52). By contrast, all but one of the pocket models sound good with their supplied earphones.

All the digital radios on test handle marginal-reception conditions quite well (see How We Test, page 52) except the Bush BPR07DAB and Grundig. At the difficult-reception location, all lost some signal strength, but the Bush BPR07DAB, Digitech AR1754, Philips, Roberts SolarDAB and both OXX radios either went silent or were judged too difficult to listen to. These will not be suitable if you live in an area that has very poor reception.

Power of the sun

The Roberts SolarDAB has a small solar cell on top. It doesn't have quite enough power to run on its own in full sunlight, but it will recharge the battery, and we found one hour's charge in the sun provided about 30 minutes of playback. This will extend the life of a full charge if you're listening outdoors in the sun. >

POCKET DIGITAL RADIOS		PERFORMANCE					FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS	
		Overall score (%)					Speakers	Earphones included	3.5mm headphone socket	Clock	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Weight (g)**
Brand / model (in rank order)			Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Reception score (%)	Standby energy score (%)						
Sangean DPR34		78	75	69	90	100	1	✓	✓	✓	10.5 x 6 x 2.5	1
OXX Digital Pocket		75	70	74	77	100		✓	✓		10 x 4 x 2.5 (A)	8
Digitech AR1754 Portable DAB+ and FM Radio/Earphones		72	70	63	77	100		✓			9 x 4 x 2.5 (A)	5
Grundig GPR800DAB Roam HANDHELD DAB+ RADIO		72	70	66	63	100	1	✓	✓	✓	10.5 x 6 x 2.5	1
Bush BPR07DAB Walker Handheld DAB+ Radio		63	55	73	57	100		✓	✓		9 x 4.5 x 2.5 (A)	5

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Sound quality: 60%; Ease of use: 20%; Reception: 10%; Standby energy: 10%.

WHAT TO BUY

POCKET DIGITAL RADIOS



78% Sangean
DPR34 Plus

PRICE \$189

GOOD POINTS

- Good reception in difficult locations.
- Fixed rechargeable lithium polymer battery included.

BAD POINTS

- On-board speaker lacks volume.
- Setting presets is awkward.



75% OXX Digital
Pocket

PRICE \$130

GOOD POINTS

- Two AAA alkaline batteries included.

BAD POINTS

- Poor reception in difficult locations.
- No AC power option.
- No dynamic range control.



72% Grundig
GPR800DAB

PRICE \$179

GOOD POINTS

- Fixed rechargeable lithium polymer battery included.

BAD POINTS

- On-board speaker lacks volume.
- Borderline reception in difficult locations.

All but one of the pocket digital radios on test sound good with their supplied earphones

ARE WE THERE YET?

The federal government says there isn't yet enough suitable spectrum available for permanent digital radio in regional Australia, a situation that is unlikely to improve until after the analog TV switch-off in 2013. So the roll-out of digital radio beyond Australia's five major cities is no sure thing. However, unlike analog TV, there are no plans to switch off analog radio, so FM and AM are likely to be around for a long time yet.

Digital station presets	Station presets	Display (lines x characters)	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Batteries	Contact	Price (\$)
Via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16 (B)	45 x 19	1 x Li-polymer (fixed)	sangean.com.au	189
Button, front	20+ DAB and FM	2 x 29 (B)	23 x 12	2 x AAA	oxxdigital.com	130
Button, front	20+ DAB and FM	2 x 29 (B)	23 x 12	2 x AAA	electusdistribution.com.au	99
Button, front then via menu	20 DAB, 20 FM	2 x 16 (B)	31 x 16	1 x Li-polymer (fixed)	grundig.net.au	179
Button, front	20+ DAB and FM	2 x 29 (B)	23 x 12	2 x AAA	bushaustralia.com.au	129

LE NOTES * Rounded up to the nearest 0.5cm, in open configuration if applicable. ** Including power lead, if not detachable. **ns** Not stated. Including rigid part of earphone connector. **(B)** There is a line of status information above the main display line.

Look for a screen on which you can clearly see the scrolling text, so you can search for stations by entering their name

WHAT TO BUY

BENCHTOP DIGITAL RADIOS



71% Roberts SolarDAB

PRICE \$229

GOOD POINTS

- Rechargeable batteries included.
- Can recharge its batteries in the unit.
- Solar power option.
- Unlimited presets.

BAD POINTS

- Very poor reception in difficult locations.

HOW WE TEST

Sound quality Our testers, Chris Ruggles (left) and Scott O'Keefe (right), listen to each radio at the same volume for distortion, rattles or other odd noises, stereo separation where appropriate and a natural sound across all frequencies.

Ease of use Tester James Thomson uses all the main functions of the radios to assess their ease of use. In particular, he looks for ease of the initial setup, clear labelling, placement and functionality of the buttons and knobs, as well as

the size and clarity of the display and intuitive and logical menus.

Reception James checks for reception quality in three different locations. The first site is classed as optimal reception, while the second represents an area of marginal reception. The final test involves an area with difficult reception due to its distance from the broadcast tower and no line of sight for the signal to reach the radio.

Standby energy James measures the radio's standby energy use with the display at minimum brightness.



BENCHTOP DIGITAL RADIOS		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATION	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Reception score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	Speakers	3.5mm headphone socket	Clock	Alarms	Carry handle	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*
Roberts SolarDAB	71	65	80	60	100	1	✓	✓			14 x 20.5 x 7
Bush BR20DAB DAB+	65	70	75	83	0	2	✓	✓		✓	21.5 x 31 x 9.5
OXX Vantage Portable Digital Radio	61	50	78	70	80	1	✓	✓	2		15 x 21.5 x 9
Roberts Dreamtime	61	60	72	90	20	1	✓	✓	2		6.5 x 17 x 13
TEAC Stereo DAB Radio DAB400W	61	50	78	93	60	2	✓	✓	2	✓	17 x 27 x 12.5
Sangean DPR69	57	35	82	93	100	1	✓	✓			11 x 16.5 x 4
Pure OneMi VL61412	55	40	70	93	80	1		✓			10 x 16 x 4
Bush BR08DAB DAB+	53	35	68	83	100	1	✓	✓			13.5 x 13 x 5.5
Philips AE5230 Portable Digital Radio	50	30	77	67	100	1	✓	✓			10.5 x 20.5 x 4.5
sToneTech DB-80F	49	40	76	93	0	1	✓	✓	2		10.5 x 18 x 12
Digitech AR1751 Compact DAB+ and FM Radio Tuner	48	30	69	80	80	1	✓	✓	1		8 x 18 x 5
mbeat DAB01W DAB+ Radio	45	25	75	93	60	1	✓	✓			10 x 17.5 x 4.5

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Batteries provide portability as well as making the radio a useful information source if the power goes out. Normal batteries (such as AA) are more readily available, but some manufacturers claim longer life from their dedicated battery packs. All the pocket radios on test lasted more than 11.5 hours on one set of batteries; the Grundig was still going after

18 hours.

Screen size and shape are important so you can see the scrolling text, particularly when searching for a station by entering its name.

Speakers The radios on test have either mono or stereo speakers, but stereo does not necessarily ensure better sound quality.

A clock with an alarm is useful for waking up, but can also remind you a program is about to start. Digital radios can update their clock from the broadcast, so they should keep accurate time and recover well after a power outage. All benchtop radios on test have a clock, but not all have an alarm

(see table below for those with both).

USB connection can be used for firmware upgrades if required. Only the Roberts models have this feature, but the Pure and Grundig both

have a USB port that can be used to recharge the battery.

A headphone socket allows you to listen in private and can sometimes also act as a line-out. All radios on test have one except the Pure.



ABOUT THE REST

None of the radios on test is particularly difficult to use, but we found the the buttons on the **Digitech AR1754** pocket radio don't always respond when pressed so we can't recommend it. We purchased a second sample that is more responsive and, since it is relatively cheap, it could be an option if the retailer agrees to take it back should you have similar problems. The **Bush BPR07DAB** pocket model has a slight background hiss and the lowest reception score on test.

Sound quality is generally poor for the benchtop radios; the **Bush BR20DAB** is a notable exception. The **Roberts Dreamtime** is OK, but the **OXX Vantage** and **TEAC** only manage borderline scores. The **StoneTech** shares equal top score for reception with the **mbeat**, **Pure**, **Sangean DPR69** and **TEAC**.

Claimed power output (W, total)	Digital station presets	Station presets	Display (lines x characters)	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Batteries	Contact	Price (\$)
1	Button, front	Unlimited	2 x 16	75 x 15	3 x AA	robertsradio.com.au	229
2 x 1	Touchkey, top	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	62 x 15	6 x C	bushaustralia.com.au	149
2	Button, front then via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	56 x 11	6 x C	oxxdigital.com	130
0.5	Button, front then via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	1 x 8 (A)	66 x 18	na	robertsradio.com.au	149
2 x 2	Buttons, top	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	55 x 11	6 x C	teac.com.au	169
0.5	Buttons, front	5 DAB, 5 FM	2 x 16	47 x 8	4 x AA	sangean.com.au	189
1	Button, front then via menu	8 DAB, 8 FM	1 x 8 (A)	44 x 8	ChargePak A1	pure.com	79
0.5	Via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 15	25 x 9	4 x AA	bushaustralia.com.au	80
0.3	Buttons, top	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	50 x 11	6 x AA	philips.com.au	140
ns	Buttons, under cover, top	8 DAB, 8 FM	2 x 16	55 x 11	6 x AA	giftsngadgets.com.au	98
ns	Button, top then via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	29 x 8	4 x AA	electusdistribution.com.au	89
ns	Button, front then via menu	10 DAB, 10 FM	2 x 16	55 x 10	4 x AA	mbeat.com.au	70

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of: Sound quality: 60%; Ease of use: 20%; Reception: 10%; Standby energy: 10%.

TABLE NOTES

* Rounded up to the nearest 0.5cm, in open configuration if applicable. ** Including power lead, if not detachable; rounded to nearest 0.1kg. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** There is a line of status information above the main display line.



STORY MARTHA PSIROUKIS

Smarter than the average fridge?

We test a fridge that claims to think for itself – providing you press the right button and the room temperature doesn't change...

NUTSHELL

>> Eleven newly tested fridges join our previously tested models, but only one makes our What to Buy list.

>> We find artificial intelligence in one fridge, but it's not all it's cracked up to be.

>> To find out how we test fridges and what to look for, see *CHOICE*, December 2010/January 2011, or log on to www.choice.com.au/fridges

The newly tested Haier HDT647AS French door fridge has one of the more interesting features *CHOICE* has come across – an “artificial intelligence” mode that claims to maintain optimum compartment temperatures regardless of ambient changes. The ability of a fridge to do this is very important, particularly if your kitchen is susceptible to large ambient temperature changes, say between summer and winter.

While many fridges can already monitor and adapt to changing external temperatures regardless of marketing gimmicks such as this, the Haier has a specific mode that you can switch on and off. The artificial intelligence mode

sets the temperature for both the fresh food and freezer compartments, so you'll have to switch it off if you want different temperatures. We tested the Haier with the mode on and off, but there was little difference in the results – the mode didn't keep optimum fridge temperatures when we changed ambient conditions from 32°C, down to near 10°C, up to 40°C and then back to 32°C. So if you buy this fridge you'll have to adjust the controls in winter to keep your food fresh.

Despite the “artificial intelligence” making no difference, the Haier is still a good fridge all round and makes our What to Buy list (see opposite). >

RELIABILITY

Fridges are generally a reliable product. Westinghouse and Fisher & Paykel consistently make our What to Buy lists, and both rank well in the reliability table. Of problems with both these brands, 21%-25% relate to door seals, temperature control or food icing. If you own a Maytag or GE, you're more likely to experience problems. In 2008/09, 31% of Maytag fridge owners who had problems experienced water leakage and 24% poor temperature control. Of problems with GE fridges, 20% were associated with temperature control and 19% with controls, switches or thermostat. Unfortunately we don't have any reliability information for Haier fridges, so we can't class the recommended HDT647AS (opposite) as a Best Buy, despite its keen purchase price.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Mitsubishi (76)	94
LG (884)	90
Kelvinator/Electrolux (685)	89
Fisher & Paykel (3622)	88
Westinghouse (2893)	88
Samsung (597)	83
Whirlpool (448)	83
Maytag (224)	72
GE (124)	68
All refrigerators (9553)	87

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.



WHAT TO BUY

These are the best fridges in each size range, with a minimum of 60% for all aspects of temperature performance except the recommended setting score. (We exclude this because you can

change the recommended setting to get a better result.) Best Buys are top performers with a good reliability rating that are relatively cheap to buy and run. Where possible, we've included both top and bottom

freezers in relevant size categories.

For profiles of the models in the What to Buy list, see the relevant CHOICE issue as indicated next to each model or go online to www.choice.com.au/fridges.

SMALL (300L-380L)



BEST BUY

Fisher & Paykel
E381T
(May 06) \$959



Westinghouse
WBM3700WB
(May 09) \$1269

(MEDIUM) (381L-450L)



Fisher & Paykel
E442B (Dec 10/Jan11)
\$1589



Fisher & Paykel
E406B (May 09)
\$1569

LARGE (451L-525L)



BEST BUY

Fisher & Paykel
E521T (Nov 06)
\$1519



Westinghouse
WBM5100WB
(Sept 09) \$1899

SIDE-BY-SIDE



Westinghouse
WSE6100WA
(Nov 05) \$2009

LARGER THAN 525L, INCLUDING FRENCH DOOR



Fisher & Paykel
RF610A (Nov 07)
\$3299



NEW Haier
HDT647AS
\$2149

79% Haier
HDT647AS

PRICE: \$ 2149

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperature performance.
- Excellent for temperature fluctuations.
- Very good for temperature uniformity.
- Digital controls on the exterior.
- Shelves can be removed when the door is at 90 degrees.
- Door alarm and self-closing doors.

BAD POINTS

- Fresh food compartment may get a little too warm in winter if controls are not adjusted.
- Artificial intelligence mode does not improve the ambient change result.
- The main freezer compartment is a deep drawer, which may be difficult for some people to access.



For the best deal, call CHOICE Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your CHOICE personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.



PRODUCT					PERFORMANCE										FEATURES		
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)					Freezer	Number of doors	Overall score (%)	Temperature performance score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)	Range score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Ambient change score (%)	Recommended setting score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	Noise level (dB)	Chiller
< 300L	# Mitsubishi MR-260B-W-A	Top	2	68			64	50	75	65	66	75	83	425 / 400	34	✓	
	Westinghouse WTB2300WB-XAU	Top	2	67			63	80	70	60	29	80	81	411 / 403	39	✓	
	Fisher & Paykel E249T	Top	2	48			39	15	65	65	54	90	84	387 / 374	34		
	# Whirlpool WRI27UG	Top	2	48			39	0	75	75	15	35	83	425 / 402	39	✓	
SMALL (300L-380L)	Fisher & Paykel E381T	Top	2	79			77	60	80	85	90	80	85	433 / 424	35		
	Westinghouse WBM3700WB	Bottom	2	76			74	65	90	75	67	70	82	495 / 481	38		
	Fisher & Paykel E372B	Bottom	2	74			72	50	85	70	85	85	82	498 / 482	35		
	# Fisher & Paykel E331T	Top	2	67			63	45	80	75	69	85	83	405 / 430	31		
	# Miele KFN 12823 SD-1	Bottom	2	57			50	40	60	60	76	25	85	414 / 399	38		
MEDIUM (381L-450L)	Fisher & Paykel E442B	Bottom	2	78			78	60	90	85	81	85	79	563 / 573	30		
	Fisher & Paykel E406B	Bottom	2	76			76	65	90	60	90	80	78	564 / 559	30		
	Fisher & Paykel E440T	Top	2	74			72	50	85	80	77	85	83	488 / 494	30		
	Fisher & Paykel E402B	Bottom	2	73			72	60	85	65	80	80	78	528 / 561	35		
	Electrolux ETM4407SC	Top	2	72			68	75	90	65	33	70	90	369 / 353	37		
	Kelvinator KTM4400WB	Top	2	72			69	65	90	70	45	80	84	486 / 464	41		
	Westinghouse WBM4300WB	Bottom	2	72			70	75	85	55	66	50	81	530 / 529	37		
	Kelvinator KBM4300WB	Bottom	2	71			69	80	65	85	53	30	78	565 / 580	39		
	Kelvinator KTM3900WB-R	Top	2	70			67	50	90	80	50	75	82	463 / 477	34		
	Fisher & Paykel E411T	Top	2	67			63	40	85	90	72	50	83	454 / 478	35		
	# Mitsubishi MR-385B-W-A	Top	2	66			61	35	90	65	86	85	85	490 / 425	36	✓	
	# Electrolux EBM4307SC (A)	Bottom	2	64			58	60	70	40	62	50	88	406 / 402	33	✓	
	Whirlpool WRID41TW	Top	2	64			58	55	80	65	25	60	86	430 / 424	43	(E)	
	Daewoo FR-4501W	Top	2	58			53	45	83	60	39	70	79	495 / 550	39	✓	
LARGE (451L-525L)	Fisher & Paykel E521T	Top	2	78			76	60	85	85	77	80	85	508 / 496	35		
	Westinghouse WBM5100WB	Bottom	2	76			74	75	85	70	65	55	84	560 / 526	39		
	Electrolux EBM5100SC	Bottom	2	74			70	70	80	65	62	80	89	428 / 401	34		
	Kelvinator KBM5100MB	Bottom	2	74			72	80	70	80	57	60	81	589 / 593	38		
	# Bosch KGN53X70AU/08	Bottom	2	73			70	80	75	70	53	50	83	505 / 490	37	✓	
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRXFDU	Bottom	2	72			70	55	85	70	77	50	79	636 / 627	34		
	Fisher & Paykel E522B	Bottom	2	71			69	60	80	50	87	80	78	596 / 642	37		
> 525L & FD	Electrolux ETM5207SC-R (B)	Top	2	65			59	55	85	55	30	75	90	402 / 377	33	✓	
	# Haier HDT647AS	Bottom	3	79			79	90	75	80	65	90	80	690 / 698	38	✓	
	Fisher & Paykel RF610A	Bottom	3	78			78	70	80	80	83	85	79	695 / 688	37		
	# Electrolux EQE6007SB-NAU	Bottom	4	70			67	40	85	90	85	70	84	616 / 661	34	✓	
SIDE-BY-SIDES	Westinghouse WSE6100WA	Left	2	77			76	75	80	60	90	75	79	687 / 705	41		
	Bosch KAN56V10AU (C)	Left	2	75			73	60	80	80	75	85	82	630 / 636	37		
	LG GC-L197STF	Left	2	75			74	70	80	70	76	70	81	638 / 645	33		
	Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	Left	2	74			72	60	80	75	74	90	81	650 / 665	38	(E)	
	Bosch KAN58A40AU (D)	Left	2	72			71	70	70	70	70	90	74	750 / 758	38		
	Smeg SR650XA	Left	2	66			63	70	40	80	64	60	77	760 / 726	38		
	# Samsung SRS691GDIS	Left	2	65			59	40	80	55	89	70	78	757 / 769	34		
	# Whirlpool 6WSC21N4XY00	Left	2	60			54	30	90	35	89	80	84	685 / 589	40		

SPECIFICATIONS										COSTS	
Fresh food shelves/ shelf positions	Rollers	All shelves removable at 90°	Door hinge position	Claimed dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Contact		10-year running costs (\$)	Price (\$)
3/5		✓	R	1592 x 555 x 654	260	ns	ns	mitsubishielelectric.com.au		800	912
3/7			Rev	1389 x 542 x 620	230	161	65	westinghouse.com.au		806	689
3/11			Rev	1595 x 525 x 575	248	191	57	fp.com.au		748	819
3/5	✓		R	1705 x 560 x 670	268	204	64	whirlpool.com.au		804	849
3/18	✓	✓	Rev	1595 x 635 x 712	380	283	97	fp.com.au		848	959
2/7	✓		R or L	1620 x 652 x 709	365	243	122	westinghouse.com.au		962	1269
2/13	✓	✓	R or L	1595 x 635 x 736	373	250	123	fp.com.au		964	1329
2/13	✓		Rev	1425 x 635 x 712	329	232	97	fp.com.au		860	969
3/9	✓	✓	Rev	1820 x 600 x 630	339	231	108	miele.com.au		798	1799
3/17	✓		R	1695 x 680 x 730	442	307	135	fp.com.au		1146	1589
3/13	✓		R or L	1595 x 680 x 736	404	271	133	fp.com.au		1118	1569
3/20	✓		R or L	1695 x 680 x 734	447	342	105	fp.com.au		988	1299
3/10	✓		R or L	1695 x 635 x 730	403	280	123	fp.com.au		1122	1269
3/17	✓		R or L	1720 x 700 x 745	442	339	103	electrolux.com.au		706	2589
3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 703	431	300	131	kelvinator.com.au		928	1219
3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 709	431	300	131	westinghouse.com.au		1058	1529
2/10	✓	✓	R or L	1720 x 703 x 703	442	339	103	kelvinator.com.au		1160	1319
3/12	✓		R or L	1720 x 703 x 641	390	302	91	kelvinator.com.au		954	1009
3/20	✓		R or L	1695 x 635 x 736	411	314	97	fp.com.au		956	1089
2/2	✓		R	1587 x 687 x 694	385	255	130	mitsubishielelectric.com.au		850	1202
2/8	✓		R	1702 x 690 x 612	430	300	131	electrolux.com.au		804	2639
2/5	✓	✓	R	1652 x 700 x 695	410	302	108	whirlpool.com.au		848	1099
2/4	✓		R	1759 x 710 x 712	405	280	125	daewooelectronics.com.au		1100	849
3/20	✓		R or L	1695 x 790 x 734	517	400	117	fp.com.au		992	1519
3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 803 x 709	504	348	156	westinghouse.com.au		1052	1899
2/8	✓	✓	R or L	1720 x 803 x 745	510	349	156	electrolux.com.au		802	2379
2/10	✓	✓	R or L	1720 x 803 x 703	505	349	156	kelvinator.com.au		1186	1799
3/4	✓		Rev	1700 x 700 x 750	451	332	119	bosch-home.com.au		980	1899
3/17	✓	✓	R	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au		1254	2509
3/17	✓	✓	R or L	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au		1284	1709
3/10	✓		R or L	1720 x 800 x 745	520	396	121	electrolux.com.au		754	2799
4/15 (F)	✓	✓	na	1770 x 910 x 710	647	423	211	haierappliances.com.au		1396	2149
2/14	✓		na	1780 x 900 x 730	614	433	181	fp.com.au		1376	3299
2/4	✓	✓	na	1720 x 890 x 818	602	370	232	electrolux.com.au		1322	3699
3/12	✓		na	1754 x 898 x 741	606	357	249	westinghouse.com.au		1410	2009
3/7	✓		na	1800 x 903 x 733	618	377	241	bosch-home.com.au		1272	2049
3/9	✓		na	1758 x 894 x 690	567	353	214	lge.com.au		1050	2199
3/6	✓		na	1790 x 895 x 730	618	377	241	daewooelectronics.com.au		1330	1399
2/5	✓		na	1800 x 903 x 733	603	377	226	bosch-home.com.au		1516	2999
3/7	✓		na	1795 x 900 x 681	603	377	226	smeg.com.au		1452	2790
3/5	✓	✓	na	1777 x 908 x 745	691	434	257	samsung.com.au		1538	2999
4/5	✓	✓	na	1750 x 900 x 698	623	385	238	whirlpool.com.au		1178	1899

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall

score is made up of:

Temperature performance:

80% Energy efficiency:

20% Temperature

performance This

score is made up of:

Fluctuations: 30%; Range:

25%; Uniformity: 20%;

Ambient change: 20%;

Recommended setting:

5%. **Features** See

CHOICE December 2010/

January 2011, page 70.

Energy efficiency Based

on the fridge's energy

consumption, taking size

into account. **Noise level**

These are comparative

measurements taken

1m up and 1m away

from the fridge during

normal running. **Claimed****volumes** is how much

air space the fridge has

to cool; less space is

available for storage. Use

the volumes to get an idea

of how big the freezer

is compared with the

fresh-food compartment.

10-year running costs

are calculated at a rate

of 20c/kWh. **Price**

Recommended retail, as

of February 2011. **TABLE****NOTES #** Newly testedmodel. **na** Not applicable

— doors are side-by-

side. **ns** Not stated. **Rev**Reversible door. **(A)** The

Electrolux EBM4307SC

can be combined with nine

other models to create

25 combinations. The

Electrolux EBM4300SC

is similar but with curved

doors. **(B)** The Electrolux

ETMS200SC is technically

similar and is expected

to perform the same. **(C)**

The Bosch KAN56V40AU

is technically similar and

is expected to perform

the same. **(D)** The

Bosch KAN58A70AU is

technically similar and is

expected to perform the

same. **(E)** This chiller was

too warm in our tests for

optimal storage of highly

perishable foods. **(F)** Four

half-width shelves.

Of the
fridges
that didn't
make our
What to
Buy list in
this round
of testing,
Bosch's
large
model is
still a good
performer
overall

BELOW: One of
CHOICE's fridge
experts, Corrina
Horrigan.

LEFT TO RIGHT:
The Mitsubishi
MR-260B-W-A;
Miele KFN 12823
SD-1; Electrolux
EBM43075CR;
Bosch
KGN53X70AU/08;
Electrolux
EQ60075B-NAU
and the Samsung
SR5691DIS.

ABOUT THE REST

LESS THAN 300L

The **Mitsubishi MR-260B-W-A** has a good range of temperature combinations, a very good freezer reserve (-27°C) and a self-closing freezer door and its shelves can be removed with the door at 90 degrees. But it has fairly large temperature fluctuations in the freezer, the chiller may not be cold enough at some temperature settings, the door may be a bit too warm at some temperature settings and it has no door alarm.

The **Whirlpool WR127UG** has a good freezer reserve (-24°C) and self-closing doors (though they do not always work). Drawbacks include poor temperature performance, very large temperature fluctuations in both compartments and a freezer that can get much too warm in winter if the controls are not adjusted. It's also relatively noisy.

SMALL (300L-380L)

The **Fisher & Paykel E331T** has a very good range of temperatures and default temperature setting, self-closing doors, a good number of shelf positions in the fresh food compartment and a door alarm. However, it's poor for temperature fluctuations and the shelves are difficult to remove with door opened to 90 degrees.

The **Miele KFN 12823 SD-1** has a good freezer reserve (-24°C), self-

closing doors, a door alarm, a metal wine rack and shelves that can be removed with the door at 90 degrees. But its performance is poor for temperature fluctuations, the default temperature setting is too warm for fresh food, and it's only OK for temperature uniformity – especially in the fresh food compartment.

MEDIUM (381L-450L)

The **Mitsubishi MR-385B-W-A** has an excellent range of temperature combinations, a very good response to seasonal change and self-closing doors. But it has poor temperature fluctuations, especially in the freezer, and the chiller may not be cold enough at some temperature settings.

The **Electrolux EBM43075C-R** is let down by its poor temperature uniformity score, especially in the freezer. It's only OK for temperature performance, its doors are not self-closing and the shelves inside the door may be too warm at some temperature settings.

LARGE (451L-525L)

The **Bosch KGN53X70AU/08** has a very good temperature fluctuations score and easy-to-use digital controls for the freezer – but they're inside the door. Downsides include a fresh-food compartment that may get too cold in winter, fresh-food shelves that are difficult to remove and freezer

drawers that are difficult to replace, and there's no door alarm.

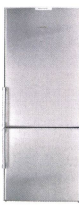
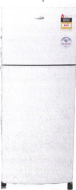
LARGER THAN 525L & FR. DOOR

The **Electrolux EQE60075B-NAU** is excellent for uniformity, has a very good response to seasonal change, is able to achieve a very good range of temperature combinations and has a door alarm. But it's poor for temperature fluctuations.

SIDE BY SIDE

The **Samsung SR5691DIS** has a good range of temperature combinations, a very good response to seasonal change, a door alarm and self-closing doors, a metal wine rack, and a nifty angled can holder that can be flipped away when not in use. However, it has fairly large temperature fluctuations in the freezer and fresh-food compartments, its chiller may not be cold and the door shelves may be a little warm at some temperature settings.

The **Whirlpool 6WSC21N4XY00** has an excellent range of temperature combinations, handles seasonal change very well and has a door alarm and self-closing doors. But it has large fluctuations in freezer temperature, performs poorly for uniformity, especially in the fresh-food compartment, its door shelves may be a bit too warm at some temperature settings, and it's comparatively noisy.





NUTSHELL

>> The least expensive systems on test lack power, but so do some of the dearer ones.

>> Bigger speakers generally produce better results, but one system proves you can also get good sound from a small package.

STORY CHRIS RUGGLES

Small system big sound

These mini hi-fis deliver good sound without breaking the bank.

Over the past few years, Apple has sold more than 50 million iPods worldwide a year. That's a lot of music in people's pockets, but what do you do when you want to share your iPod's tunes at home?

We tested 11 mini and midi hi-fi systems with iPod dock, and overall, we're impressed with the sound quality some of these relatively cheap and compact products can produce. >

HOW WE TEST

Sound quality Our expert panellists listen to a selection of six different types of music. They score each system for bass, mid-tone and treble response, ease of listening and clarity.

Ease of use Our tester, James Thomson (below), scores instruction manuals, ease of setting up, remote controls, on-board controls and display.

Standby energy consumption James uses a regulated power supply and calibrated power meter to measure the energy consumed by the system when in standby.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Line-in/USB/auxiliary connection allows access for external devices such as an MP3 player or laptop. **Video out** (component, composite or HDMI) allows you to play videos from your iPod on a TV.

The remote control should be easy to read, with large, well-spaced buttons and clear labels.

Memory cards such as SD or MMC can be slotted into some stereos to provide direct access to music.

These are often used in mobile phones for additional storage, and so can be used to transport your music collection from phone to stereo.

AM/FM or digital (DAB+) radio Not all systems come with both AM and

FM, and digital radio is relatively new technology [see page 50 for our review].

Headphone input allows for private listening. All units on test have one except the Sony.

Clock/alarm function can be useful if you have the stereo in your bedroom. All models on test have one.

Automatic clock backup will keep the clock going if the power fails. Systems with digital radio may also reset the clock accurately when power is restored.



The Samsung sound have made our What to Buy list based on sound quality, but we can't recommend it because of its very poor ease of use with an iPod

WHAT TO BUY



83% Sharp CDSW440NH

PRICE \$449

This is a relatively bulky system but has good frequency response from top to bottom and can handle a wide variety of music styles very well. However, it does struggle a little in the higher frequencies.

It has a composite video-out for watching videos from your iPod on TV, and a USB port for playing MP3 or WMA files. It's also the only model on test with a cassette player. Its on-board iPod controls can be tricky when selecting tracks, and are limited to play/pause and track back and forward. For all other functions, you have to use the remote or your iPod.



81% LG MCT566

PRICE \$399

Our listening panel was impressed with the LG's definition in the highs and lows. They noted some loss of detail in the mid-range, but felt it didn't deteriorate too badly. It's well suited to electronic music in particular, but is not the best choice if you're a classical music fan.

It has both composite and component video outputs, as well as a USB port for playing MP3, WAV or WMA files. There's a clock radio that you can set to wake you by playing a DVD. Its controls are easy to use but can be inaccurate when selecting tracks on an iPod. It can't play and recharge an iPod at the same time.



78% Sony MHCEC709iP

PRICE \$279

This is one of the bigger systems on test, but doesn't have a subwoofer. Our panel thought the sound "competent to good", but that some rock and pop sounded a little harsh in the high frequencies, and some classical music a little dull. We tried it with its bass booster on, which helped a bit, but still left the panel feeling there was something missing.

The Sony doesn't have any outputs – not even a headphone socket – but does have a clock radio with alarm. Its controls are easy to use, but it can be inaccurate when using the on-board controls.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Standby energy consumption score (%)	CD / DVD player	USB port	Headphones output	Video output	Automatic clock backup
Sharp CDSW440NH	83	85	67	100	✓ / -		✓	Composite	✓ (A)
LG MCT566	81	85	73	60	✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	Composite, component	
Sony MHCEC709iP	78	75	77	100	✓ / -				
Yamaha MCR-040	74	70	77	100	✓ / -	✓	✓		via DA
Samsung MM-C430	73	80	54	60	✓ / ✓	✓	✓	Composite, component, HDMI	
Panasonic SC-PM42	66	60	78	80	✓ / -	✓	✓		
JVC UX-F3B	64	60	72	80	✓ / -	✓	✓	Composite	
TDK NX-8-CD	63	65	67	40	✓ / -	✓	✓	Composite	
Bush BMS05DABIP	62	60	68	60	✓ / -		✓		via DA
Grundig GMS558DABIP	57	55	70	40	✓ / -		✓		via DA
Philips DC156	56	60	69	0	✓ / -		✓		

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Sound quality: 70%; Ease of use: 20%; Standby energy consumption: 10%. Price Recommended retail, as of February 2011



74% Yamaha MCR-040

PRICE \$499

The panel was impressed with the power and natural sound from the Yamaha's small, brick-like speakers. However, they felt it lacked detail in the high frequencies.

The speakers have a vent in the rear, so they need some space behind them to make sure the bass response isn't reduced. Outputs are limited to one headphone socket, but it's one of three systems on test with a combined digital (DAB+) and FM radio. On-board controls are limited to play/pause and it can be inaccurate when selecting tracks on the iPod. However, its remote control is easy to use.

ABOUT THE REST

Based on sound quality, the **Samsung** should be in our What to Buy list, but its ease of use with an iPod is very poor so we can't recommend it. It's OK when playing a CD or DVD but requires a screen (such as a TV) to navigate tracks, and you can't use the iPod to control anything. The on-screen menu is logical but quite different to the iPod's, and the on-board controls are sluggish, which makes it easy to miss the track you're after. You have to point the remote control at the main unit's receptor very precisely, which means a lot of frustrating button pushing.

The sound from the **Panasonic** is OK but thin and a bit harsh. It's easy to use but has no auxiliary output to connect it to other devices.

The **JVC** is easy to use, can rip CDs to its USB port and has a composite video out. It also has two iPod docks so you can charge both while playing from either, but the sound lacks bass.

The **TDK's** speakers are very thin and can be hung on a wall, but it also has a bulky subwoofer that needs to be placed on a solid surface. The panel found the system reasonably well balanced but lacking power.



The **Bush** is one of the smallest and lightest systems on test. The panel found it sounded small and light, but the sound is quite well balanced.

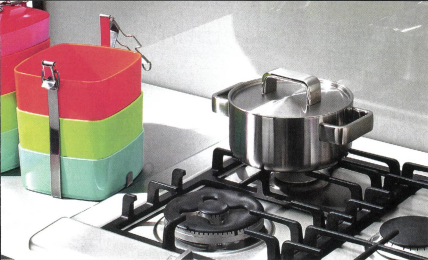
The **Grundig** is easy to use and has a digital radio, but the panel found it underpowered, lacking in bass and generally sounding dull.

The **Philips** sounds OK but isn't as good in high and low frequencies. It can't play MP3 files from a CD and it uses more than 2W in standby – more than any other system on test.

SPECIFICATIONS

On-board alarm controls	Radio	Claimed power output, L + R (W, subwoofer)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Weight (kg)**	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Contact	Price
	AM, FM	100 + 100, (150)	32 x 83 x 30.5	16.4	68 x 12	sharp.net.au	449
✓	AM, FM	80 + 80	30 x 43 x 27.5	11.9	70 x 24	lg.com.au	399
	AM, FM	85 + 85	31 x 64 x 38.5	10.7	63 x 12	sony.com.au	279
	FM, DAB	15 + 15	12 x 42.5 x 33	6.7	77 x 13	yamahamusic.com.au	499
	FM	60 + 60	26.5 x 52 x 24.5	6.3	60 x 9	samsung.com.au	299
	AM, FM	20 + 20	22.5 x 44.5 x 29.5	6.3	57 x 17	panasonic.com.au	249
	FM	30 + 30	25 x 51 x 28.5	5.6	62 x 15	jvc-australia.com	299
	FM	5 + 5, (30)	20.5 x 66 x 25.5	6.3	59 x 24	tdk-media.com.au	249
✓	FM, DAB	5 + 5	18 x 39.5 x 25	2.7	56 x 11	bushaustralia.com.au	199
	FM, DAB	10 + 10	23.5 x 43.5 x 23	4.3	65 x 21	grundig.net.au	269
	AM, FM	5 + 5	23.5 x 42 x 21.5	4.4	55 x 28	philips.com.au	180

BLE NOTES * Include both centre unit and speakers, rounded up to nearest 0.5cm, in open configuration if applicable. ****** Includes both centre unit and speakers and power lead, rounded to the nearest 0.1kg. **(A)** Manual states: "for a few hours."



STORY MARTHA PSIROUKIS

Cooking with gas

Induction technology hasn't taken the heat out of gas cooktops.

differences for individual cooking scores, so check these to find one that suits your own cooking needs. In most cases you can compensate for poorer cooking performance, but it's much harder to adapt to poor burner layout or controls that are difficult to use. See What to Look For, below right, to find the right cooktop for you. >

NUTSHELL

>> Four rectangular gas cooktops and four square ones join our list of previously tested models.

>> CHOICE still does not recommend gas cooktops without a flame-failure device.

Induction cooking is making major inroads into the cooktop market (see *CHOICE*, April 2010, page 34), but cooking with gas is still the first preference for many people. Square cooktops with four burners continue to outsell the larger five- or six-burner rectangular ones. We've tested both here, along with several models from our last report that are still available (see table, page 64).

All gas cooktops perform well overall. There are some

WHAT TO BUY

SQUARE COOKTOPS

Fisher & Paykel CG604CWFW1	\$849
NEW Bosch PCH615FAU	\$999
Westinghouse GHP765S	\$849

RECTANGULAR COOKTOPS

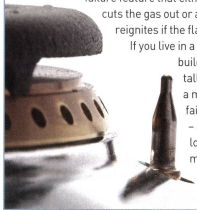
NEW Omega OG92XA	\$1599
NEW Fisher & Paykel CG905DWFCX1	\$1379
NEW Westinghouse GHP795S	\$1059

SAFETY FEATURES

Push-down knobs Knobs that have to be pushed down before they're turned on means you won't accidentally knock them, and are difficult for children to operate.

Flame-failure feature Many cooktops have a flame-failure feature that either automatically cuts the gas out or automatically reignites if the flame goes out.

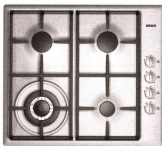
If you live in a high-rise building, 25m or taller, you may need a model with flame-failure protection – check with your local council for more information.



WHAT TO BUY

Newly tested gas cooktops that make our What to Buy list are profiled here. For profiles of previously tested models, refer to *CHOICE* April 2009, page 52. Note: we do not recommend any cooktops that don't have a flame-failure device.

SQUARE COOKTOPS



82% Bosch PCH615FAU

PRICE \$999

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for cooking rice and white sauce.
- Very good for melting chocolate and stir frying.
- Has flame failure cut-out.
- Labelling is clear and intuitive.
- The burner caps overhang the burner, helping to keep them clean.
- Controls are positioned on the side, so most are out of reach of children.

BAD POINTS

- Labelling is bonded and can scratch off or fade after prolonged cleaning.
- Only three pots fit comfortably – there is restricted access to some burners when in use due to the proximity of other burners.

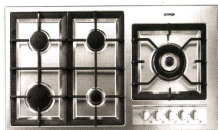


**CHOICE
ONLINE**

For more on what to look for when buying a gas cooktop, log on to www.choice.com.au/cooktops

WHAT TO BUY

RECTANGULAR COOKTOPS



85% Omega
OG92XA

PRICE \$1599

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for white sauce, stir fry and melting chocolate.
- The wok burner is segregated from the other four burners, making it easier to use large pots simultaneously.
- The burner caps overhang the burner, helping to keep them clean.
- Has flame failure cut-out.
- Good spill catchment area has two areas – one for the wok burner.

BAD POINTS

- Controls are positioned at the front of the cooktop, allowing easy access for children.
- Labelling is bonded and can scratch off or fade after prolonged cleaning.



84% Fisher & Paykel
CG905DWACX1

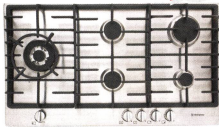
PRICE \$1379

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for white sauce, stir fry and melting chocolate.
- The wok burner is segregated from the other four burners, making it easier to use large pots simultaneously.
- The burner caps overhang the burner, helping to keep them clean.
- Has flame failure re-ignition.
- Controls positioned on the side, so most are out of reach of children.

BAD POINTS

- Labelling is bonded and can scratch off or fade after prolonged cleaning.
- No crossbar on the controls, so they're not as easy to use as others.
- The wok burner head isn't covered by the burner caps so it can get dirty.



BEST
BUY

82% Westinghouse
GHP795S

PRICE \$1059

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for white sauce and melting chocolate.
- Very good result for stir fry.
- Good burner layout; wok burner is separate from the other four, and simmer burner is at the front.
- Has flame failure cut-out.
- Burner caps overhang burner rings, helping to keep them clean.

BAD POINTS

- Labelling is bonded and can scratch off or fade after prolonged cleaning.
- Controls are positioned at the front allowing easy access for children.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Size and shape of cooktop There's a minimum distance requirement for the bottom of cupboards or rangehood above a cooktop – always check before buying.

Position of burners Consider the position and layout of the burners and their size in relation to the pots and pans you usually use. Staggered burner configurations are generally easier to use and more common on rectangular units; only the Izona CookSurface has this format.

Simmer burners should be at the front so you don't have to lean over other burners

to stir a sauce. When simmering foods that don't require frequent stirring, such as casseroles, you would normally use a medium-sized burner; these are best positioned at the back.

Controls and labels Look for knobs that are a good size, ideally with a crossbar so they're easy to grip, and a clear pointer. Controls should not be positioned too close to the trivets or the burners. Look for etched (rather than bonded) labels on stainless steel surfaces, as these don't come off over time. Bonded labels sit on the surface, while

etched are in the surface – you can feel the difference with your fingertip.

Burners and claimed ratings Gas burners are rated in megajoules per hour (MJ/h) – the amount of energy each uses on its maximum setting. Four-burner cooktops should have a good range of heat ratings, from slow (low heat: about 3.5MJ/h–5MJ/h) to fast (high heat: up to 10MJ/h or 11MJ/h), with wok burners about 12MJ/h–15MJ/h. Burner ratings don't always correlate with cooking performance results, so check our cooking scores instead.



STORY CHRIS BARNES

On the road again

CHOICE checks out 13 newcomers to the GPS scene, including three motorcycle units.

NUTSHELL

>> The bike GPS units on test all performed well.

It's only been a few months since our last GPS test, but new models are released every month, so we've hit the road again to bring you an update. This time we've included three GPS units designed for use on motorcycles. Most models are very good performers in city and regional areas, but it's the rural test that sets apart the champions from the rest.

On your bike

In addition to our usual performance and ease-of-use tests, four CHOICE motorcyclists, including our Vespa-riding CEO Nick Stace, assessed the motorcycle units, fitting them to their bikes and using them while wearing gloves. In general, they found them fiddly to install the first time and not all mounts suit all bikes, so it's worth checking before you buy. All can be hard-wired, although we didn't try this.

The riders generally preferred the **TomTom Urban Rider 4GC01**. While its small screen led to some problems with

pressing the right buttons while wearing gloves, they liked its usability and map appearance. They also liked the big, easy-to-read screen of the **Garmin zūmo 660**, but found it fiddly to enter locations and didn't like that it's designed to be hard-wired only (the cable isn't detachable). They rated the **zūmo 220 OK** overall but they found its small screen more difficult to use and the software and map appearance less functional than the **TomTom**.

A motorcycle's handlebar configuration makes a big difference to how well a unit fits and whether it's at a good height for the rider to see and operate. There's less flexibility when installing on a bike than in a car, and as vulnerable road users, motorbike riders always have to be careful when using a GPS unit. A well-positioned and easy-to-operate unit should let you keep your eyes on the road. So these GPS units are probably more of a personal choice than usual, and it pays to check out different units to see which best suits you and your bike. >

HOW WE TEST

City Our tester, Peter Horvath, selects 10 locations from all over Sydney, and performs two sets of distance calculations for each location, one from Engadine and the other from Ingleburn. The total of the predicted distances is calculated; the more accurate the predicted distance, the better the score.

Regional He selects a variety of street addresses – house/lot number, street name and town name – in and around Bathurst, NSW, to find out if the GPS provides accurate directions.

Rural Peter selects wineries and hotels in the Hunter Valley to find out if the GPS provides accurate directions.

Ease of use He assesses how useful

the instructions are, how easy it is to attach and remove the GPS and whether it vibrates during travel. He looks at how easy it is to use the menu structure on the touchscreen, and where supplied whether it is necessary to use a stylus to navigate the menu.

Verbal instructions are assessed on the quality of the voice, timing of turn and other instructions, how clear the instructions are, and whether it's possible to rely on verbal instructions without looking at the screen.

Screen quality Peter compares how easy it is to read the map, and how clear the picture is in daylight and at night-time.

Points of interest (POI) He selects 20 POI and rates the models based on how many are found and accuracy of the information supplied.

Speed of map refresh He checks how long it takes the GPS to recover after a missed turn, and after coming out of a tunnel.

Durability He checks each GPS after three hours in an oven at 60°C, which simulates the unit being left in a car on a hot day.

Bike GPS Peter checks the motorbike units for water resistance as they have to withstand rain in everyday use (all passed this test). Four CHOICE staff motorcyclists assessed ease of use.



**CHOICE
ONLINE**

To find out why GPS units can get confused in the CBD, and for full details of how we test and what to look for, visit www.choice.com.au/GPS

WHAT TO BUY

CAR GPS

86% Garmin
nüvi 1450T

PRICE \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen day and night.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- SUNA included.

BAD POINTS

- No printed manual.

**85%** Garmin
nüvi 1690

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Good screen day and night.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- SUNA included.

BAD POINTS

- No printed manual.

**84%** TomTom
Go 1000

PRICE \$379

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen day and night.
- Excellent smartphone style screen requires only light touches (but doesn't work when using fingernails only).
- Equal-best range of POI.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-size text.

BAD POINTS

- Slow to recover after losing satellite reception.
- No printed manual.

**84%** TomTom
XL 250

PRICE \$249

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen in daylight.
- Equal-best range of POI.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.

BAD POINTS

- Screen does not change automatically between day and night modes, and brightness is not adjustable in night mode.
- No printed manual.
- Fiddly to adjust the windscreen mount.

**83%** TomTom
Via 160

PRICE \$249

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen at night.
- Equal-best range of POI.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.

BAD POINTS

- Slow to recover after losing satellite reception.
- No printed manual.

**83%** Uniden
iG043

PRICE \$200

GOOD POINTS

- Very good screen in night mode.
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- Equal best range of POI.

BAD POINTS

- Unit shakes on rough roads.
- Screen lacks contrast in day mode.

**82%** Garmin
nüvi 3790T

PRICE \$549

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen in day mode.
- Very good screen in night mode (but brightness is not adjustable in night mode).
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
- SUNA included.

BAD POINTS

- Very slow to recover after a missed turn.
- No printed manual.



! HOW FAST ARE YOU GOING NOW?

With more speed cameras and police patrols on our roads, it pays to know just how fast you're driving. But which should you trust – the car's speedometer or the speed displayed on the GPS unit?

If you're travelling in a reasonably straight line, with clear skies for good GPS reception, the speed shown on the GPS will almost always be spot-on. We checked the speeds on the tested units against our reference GPS device – a special calibrated unit – and all were accurate. However, on curves or winding

roads, the GPS unit is likely to slightly understate your true speed.

Speedometers, on the other hand, may only be accurate to within 10% (up and down). Speedometers can also be inaccurate if non-standard wheels or tyres are fitted, and are affected by tyre wear or load. Although the GPS is usually more accurate, when it disagrees with your speedometer – as it often will – assume the higher one is your actual speed.



WHAT TO BUY

BIKE GPS

These models are designed for motorcycles, but can be used in a car with a suitable mount.

86% Garmin
zūmo 660

PRICE \$999 GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen in day mode.
- Very good screen in night mode.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.

BAD POINTS

- No printed manual.



83% Garmin
zūmo 220

PRICE \$699 GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen in day mode.
- Very good screen in night mode.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
- Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.

BAD POINTS

- No printed manual.
- Muffled voice for instructions.



80% TomTom Urban
Rider 4GC01

PRICE \$499 GOOD POINTS

- Excellent screen day and night.
 - Equal best range of POI.
 - Excellent indication of roads and route with good-sized text.
 - Pre-loaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- #### BAD POINTS
- Slow to recover after losing satellite reception.
 - No printed manual.
 - Unit shakes a lot, even on good-quality roads.



Product		Performance										Features				
Brand / model (in rank order)	Type	Overall score (%)	City performance score (%)	Regional performance score (%)	Rural performance score (%)	Speed of map refresh score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Verbal instructions score (%)	Screen quality score (%)	Points of interest score (%)	Routing options: No tolls / No unsealed roads / No highways	Announces school zones	Full-route display	Lane guidance	Walking mode	
Garmin nüvi 1450T	Car	86	95	100	80	70	90	80	90	72	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Garmin zūmo 660	Car/bike	86	95	95	80	80	82	80	87	82	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Garmin nüvi 1690	Car	85	95	100	80	70	86	80	80	72	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#TomTom Go 1000	Car	84	90	95	80	50	83	67	93	100	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
TomTom XL 250	Car	84	85	100	85	60	84	73	73	100	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Garmin zūmo 220	Car/bike	83	95	95	80	70	70	77	90	82	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#TomTom VIA 160	Car	83	90	95	80	50	81	67	87	100	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Uniden iG043	Car	83	90	95	80	80	67	83	67	100	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Garmin nüvi 3790T	Car	82	80	100	85	50	82	77	90	72	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#TomTom Urban Rider 4GC01	Car/bike	80	90	95	75	30	68	67	93	100	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#TomTom Start 10	Car	78	90	95	75	30	72	67	63	100	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navig8r i50 GPS	Car	77	90	95	70	50	69	77	67	77	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navman MY75T	Car	76	80	90	25	80	86	83	83	90	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navman EZY40	Car	75	80	90	25	80	79	83	80	90	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navman MY60T	Car	75	80	90	25	80	83	83	83	90	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Navman MY65T	Car	75	85	90	20	90	74	83	83	90	/// / / /	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Navman EZY30	Car	74	85	90	20	90	70	83	80	90	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Kogan Ezinav G6 KGN6GPSVAB	Car	73	95	85	45	40	74	67	57	100	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Navigon 40 Easy	Car	71	95	90	20	90	72	72	77	69	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Navigon 40 Plus	Car	71	95	90	20	90	72	72	77	69	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#Navigon 40 Premium	Car	71	95	90	20	90	72	72	77	69	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Navigon 70 Plus	Car	70	95	90	20	60	79	73	73	64	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Voxson GPS900	Car	62	90	90	15	50	53	50	57	90	- / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Performance: 50% (city 15% / regional 15% / rural 15% / speed of map refresh 5%); Ease of use: 15%; Verbal instructions: 15%; Screen quality: 10%; Points of interest: 10%. For more, see How We Test, page 66. **Features** See What to Look For, above right. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2011, or price paid.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Routing options to exclude toll roads, unsealed roads or highways.

Speed alert warns you when you exceed the speed limit for the road you're on. GPS speed-limit data can sometimes be inaccurate, so don't rely solely on the unit.

Announces school zones Some tell you when you're approaching a school, while others show a speed alert only.

Full-route display Most devices project this as a line on the map from your existing position through to your destination.

Lane guidance tells you when to move to the exit lane and displays complex multi-lane manoeuvres clearly.

Walking mode plots a route for pedestrians.

Text to speech (TTS) announces the street name so you know when to turn without having to look at the screen.

Remote trip planning allows you to run through your driving route in virtual mode.

Bluetooth Some units can communicate with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones, allowing you to make hands-free calls.

Trip log records your travels and saves the information to post online in an application such as Google Earth.

SUNA allows you to collect live traffic information out of the box with a SUNA subscription integrated into the unit.

Mac compatibility If you want to use your GPS on a computer, all models on test provide some functionality on a Windows (XP or Vista) machine. Navman and Navig8r models don't support Apple Mac OSX.

Claimed battery life lets you know if you can use the GPS for short trips without plugging it in.

Ready to navigate is the time taken from the moment you turn on the unit until enough satellites have been located to provide a position.

Memory cards may contain the latest maps, and can also store images and music files.

NZ maps are supported by all models on test.

SPECIFICATIONS

Remote trip planning	Bluetooth	MP3 player	Photo/Video/Ebook	Trip log	SUNA included	Claimed battery life (hours)	Mac support	OSX	Map provider	Ready to navigate (sec)	Map update cost (\$)	Memory card type	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Screen dimensions (mm, W x H)	Weight (g)	Contact	Price (\$)
✓	✓		✓ / - / -	✓		3	✓		Whereis	44	195	Micro SD	85 x 135 x 16	110 x 63	228	garmin.com.au	349
✓	✓	✓	✓ / - / -		(A)	5	✓		Whereis	38	195	Micro SD	84 x 135 x 23	97 x 57	290	garmin.com.au	999
	✓		✓ / - / -	ns	✓	3	✓		Whereis	38	195	Micro SD	78 x 125 x 14	95 x 54	177	garmin.com.au	499
✓	✓		- / - / -			3	✓		Whereis	33	50	None	80 x 127 x 19	95 x 55	211	tomtom.com	379
✓			- / - / -	ns		3	✓		Whereis	34	50	na	80 x 120 x 26	95 x 55	158	tomtom.com	249
✓	✓		✓ / - / -		(A)	8	✓		Whereis	43	195	Micro SD	85 x 107 x 23	72 x 54	212	garmin.com.au	699
✓	✓		- / - / -		(A)	2	✓		Whereis	90	50	None	85 x 119 x 33	95 x 55	181	tomtom.com	249
✓			✓ / - / -	✓		2.5	ns		Whereis	90	96	Micro SD	75 x 113 x 13	95 x 55	140	uniden.com.au	200
	✓	✓	✓ / - / -	ns	✓	4	ns		Whereis	44	195	Micro SD	72 x 122 x 9	93 x 56	116	garmin.com.au	549
✓	✓		- / - / -	✓		8	✓		Whereis	110	50	SD	95 x 110 x 50	70 x 53	298	tomtom.com	499
✓			- / - / -			2	✓		Whereis	68	50	None	81 x 94 x 20	70 x 53	122	tomtom.com	179
	✓	✓	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓		2.5			PSMA	75	Free	Micro SD	84 x 139 x 12	112 x 64	164	navig8r.com.au	179
	✓	✓	- / ✓ / -	✓		2			Navteq	40	99	Micro SD	88 x 141 x 17	110 x 64	189	navman.com.au	399
			- / - / -	✓	(A)	2			Navteq	42	99	Micro SD	82 x 126 x 15	95 x 55	149	navman.com.au	199
			- / - / -	✓		2			Navteq	41	99	Micro SD	85 x 135 x 15	105 x 60	171	navman.com.au	249
	✓		- / - / -	✓		2			Navteq	36	99	Micro SD	85 x 135 x 15	105 x 60	171	navman.com.au	299
			- / - / -	✓	(A)	3			Navteq	48	99	Micro SD	80 x 96 x 18	71 x 53	124	navman.com.au	179
✓	✓	✓	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓			1	✓		Sygic	75	79	Micro SD	95 x 162 x 13	134 x 75	228	kogan.com.au	199
✓			- / - / -		(A)	3	✓		Navteq	90	(B)	Micro SD	75 x 120 x 13	97 x 55	151	navigon.com	249
✓			- / - / -		(A)	3	✓		Navteq	88	(B)	Micro SD	75 x 120 x 13	97 x 55	149	navigon.com	279
✓	✓		- / - / -			3	✓		Navteq	95	(B)	Micro SD	75 x 120 x 13	97 x 55	156	navigon.com	349
✓			- / - / -		(A)	3	✓		Navteq	45	(B)	Micro SD	83 x 137 x 18	112 x 64	184	navigon.com	329
			✓ / - / -	ns		ns	ns		Navteq	42	100	Micro SD	68 x 122 x 13	95 x 53	158	voxxson.com.au	249

TABLE NOTES # Newly tested model. ns Not applicable. ns Not stated. (A) Optional. (B) Free updates every three months for two years, then \$99 for another two-year subscription.



STORY CHRIS RUGGLES

Snap happy

These cameras offer a go-anywhere option to capture your happy moments.

NUTSHELL

>> Small cameras often come with lots of features, not all of which are useful.

>> As manufacturers have stopped trying to cram more megapixels into each new camera, picture quality has improved.

In March, CHOICE updated our What to Buy list of digital cameras from the previous test in December 2010/January 2011. Since then we've tested another 13 cameras for 21 in total. The Nikon Coolpix L110 and Nikon Coolpix S8000 from the December 2010/January 2011 list have been discontinued. >

EXTRA FEATURES

GPS saves geographical information with the image. The Casio Exilim EX-H20G and Leica V-LUX 20 both have this feature.

HDR (high dynamic range) combines information from differing exposures of the same scene to capture as much detail as possible. When it works well it can improve the image by reducing areas of shadow or highlights without detail, but when it doesn't work well it can make images look garish and unrealistic. The Nikon Coolpix S8100 can do this well in some backlight conditions.

High speed movies (slow motion) Normal video is recorded at about 25 frames per second. Increasing the number of frames per second slows the motion in

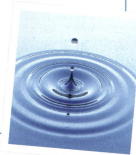
the video when played back at normal frame rate – the more frames per second, the slower the motion. This can be quite useful if you're looking for detail that's not visible at normal speed. The Canon Ixus 1000HS, Ixus 300 HS, Nikon Coolpix S8100 and Coolpix P100 all have this feature.

Face detection The camera searches the framed image for the elements that make up a face and adjusts itself to ensure the face

is in focus and well exposed. We incorporate each model's performance in this area in our image quality score.



ABOVE: Bad (top) and good (bottom) HDR.
RIGHT: High speed example.



HOW WE TEST

Camera testing is a complicated and expensive process. To help with the high cost, we share the results with a number of consumer organisations around the world. All the tests are carried out by specialist labs in Europe.

Image quality Our testers report on colour accuracy and saturation, sharpness, resolution, noise levels, distortion and vignetting in both normal and low light. All image quality appraisals are done with the camera in auto mode to ensure the tester isn't influencing the outcome.

Ease of use A test panel evaluates each camera's manual, monitor, data transfer and shutter delay. They also look at common tasks such as inserting and removing the memory card and changing menu settings.

Versatility includes an evaluation of the camera's lens, memory, sensitivity adjustment (ISO), white balance, shutter speeds, exposure options, viewfinder/monitor size and adjustment. Functions we check for include easy image deletion, red-eye reduction, focusing options and AV connections, and how long it takes before the camera is ready to take a photo.

Monitor This score measures the difference between the image displayed in the monitor and the final image, how clear the image is and, particularly for monitors, how much reflection there is in bright and poor lighting conditions.

Flash Our testers check the flash's ability to produce enough light and even illumination at one, three and five metres.

Movie quality Cameras that are able to record video are set to the highest-quality movie setting and then scored on resolution of detail, fluency of playback, picture noise and pixelation caused by compression. This is done in both bright- and low-light conditions as well as in macro mode if available. The sound quality is also scored and we check for noises caused by focusing or zooming.

WHAT TO BUY

See *CHOICE*, March 2011 [page 56] for profiles of:

Nikon Coolpix P100	\$519
Canon PowerShot SX30 IS	\$649
Canon Ixus 300 HS	\$499
Canon PowerShot SX130 IS	\$329
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX700	\$599

Our table shows cameras with scores of 64% and above. The test can be found at www.choice.com.au/digitalcameras.



72% Nikon Coolpix S8100

PRICE \$399

This relatively small camera represents good value for both its features and performance, and shares the highest image quality score with the Nikon Coolpix P100. Some colour aberrations are visible, particularly in tele mode, and indoor pictures without flash have a slight yellow-green tint with reduced sharpness, but it handles low light and outdoor conditions well.

The 102MB of internal memory is handy for those times when the removable card is full and you come across that perfect shot.

Its zoom is a little limiting indoors, but is well suited to portraits and sports and starts up quickly. Flash photos are generally good, but shutter delay is a little inconsistent and there's some noticeable loss of brightness at the edges in tele mode.

The HDMI connection makes watching your images on a TV easy, and the 1080p video makes the effort worthwhile. However, video becomes contrasty and dark in low-light conditions. Also, the audio has humming noises when zooming from tele to wide in video mode. [Strangely, this is not apparent when zooming the other way.]

Its monitor has a wide viewing angle and is good for playback for both stills and video, but lacks contrast and has a grey-brown tinge in poor light conditions.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Lens This is arguably the most important part of a camera. Focal length (or lengths in the case of a zoom) will determine how you can frame your shot. The aperture range determines how much light gets to the sensor and how much depth of field you have to play with.

Weight and size People with large or small hands need to get to grips with the camera before buying, because it's got to be comfortable and the controls should all be accessible or it will become frustrating. Relatively heavy cameras, such as the Canon PowerShot SX30 IS or Nikon Coolpix P100, may be cumbersome to lug around, but if the camera is too light, it can be difficult to hold still.

Camera controls These should be easy to recognise and use, with a layout that feels logical.

Monitor and viewfinder The monitor will be used for framing and reviewing shots as well as using menus and controls, so it's important that it can be seen in both low-light and bright conditions. Check for reflections and clarity when zooming in to check the focus of an image. Very few have a viewfinder (only the Canon PowerShot SX30 IS, Nikon Coolpix P100 and Pentax X90 of those on test), but where they do, it should be reasonably accurate and bright enough for you to see the information in it even in low light.

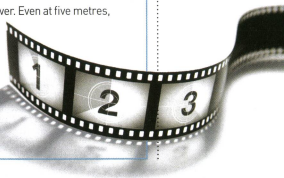
Shutter delay The best cameras on test here are as fast as some of the more expensive high-end cameras we've tested. As you press the shutter button, the camera has to calculate the exposure, find a focal point and move the lens elements and aperture diaphragm before it opens the shutter. You can make it easier for the camera if you half-depress the shutter while framing the shot, but you'll be relying on the camera entirely when going for a grab shot that's gone in a split second.

Movie Quality levels are getting better and more people are taking movies along with stills. Look for formats that are supported by the editing software you'll be using and check for problems when panning or zooming. Sound quality is often overlooked, but is very important for video. Noises from the camera when zooming or focusing are pretty common and can be very distracting.

Flash Although all these cameras come with flash built-in, they tend to lack power. Even at five metres, the worst will be struggling to provide enough light. The best will not only expose accurately at this distance, but also provide an even spread of light across the scene.



For the best deal, call *CHOICE* Shopper, 1300 360 655, with the model name and number, the price you want to beat and your *CHOICE* personal subscriber number. The full range of models on test may not be available in all states.



The Nikon Coolpix P100 and S8100 have the equal-best image quality scores of the cameras on test

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Image quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Monitor score (%)	Flash score (%)	Movie score (%)	Resolution (megapixels)	Zoom range (mm)	Memory type	
# Nikon Coolpix P100	75	79	69	79	66	74	80	10	26 - 678	SDHC	
# Canon PowerShot SX30 IS	74	70	68	83	59	97	78	14	24 - 840	SDHC	
# Nikon Coolpix S8100	72	79	65	69	63	64	77	12	30 - 300	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ8	71	76	68	74	61	72	68	12	25 - 300	SDHC	
# Canon Ixus 300 HS	70	77	59	68	66	73	81	10	28 - 105	SDHC	
# Canon PowerShot SX130 IS	70	77	62	72	50	80	77	12	28 - 336	SDHC	
# Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX700	70	75	67	76	50	73	75	14	24 - 120	SDHC	
# Casio Exilim EX-H5	69	78	67	78	39	69	67	12	24 - 240	SDHC	
# Leica V-LUX 20	69	73	67	77	63	67	64	12	25 - 300	SDHC	
# Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ10	69	73	65	76	63	67	66	12	25 - 300	SDHC	
Canon Digital Ixus 210	68	65	66	68	72	77	73	14	24 - 120	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FH20	68	74	64	72	47	72	73	14	28 - 224	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FH22	68	77	59	72	48	73	67	14	28 - 224	SDHC	
# Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX9	68	75	58	68	56	65	80	12	25 - 100	SDHC, MS-D	
Canon Digital Ixus 130	67	66	64	70	65	67	81	14	28 - 112	SDHC	
# Canon Ixus 1000HS	67	70	58	70	58	73	78	10	36 - 360	SDHC	
# Casio Exilim EX-H20G	67	77	64	79	47	45	69	14	24 - 240	SDHC	
Olympus SP-600UZ	67	70	54	76	62	80	70	12	28 - 420	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FH1	67	74	67	72	40	67	66	12	28 - 140	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FP3	67	67	68	73	54	66	74	14	35 - 140	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FT2	67	68	66	79	58	57	69	14	28 - 128	SDHC	
# Panasonic Lumix DMC-FX75	67	66	67	76	57	64	78	14	24 - 120	SDHC	
Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX5V	67	68	62	69	39	83	81	10	25 - 250	SDHC, MS-D	
Canon PowerShot SX210 IS	66	65	65	70	61	63	72	14	28 - 392	SDHC	
Panasonic Lumix DMC-FH3	66	65	68	72	46	72	68	14	28 - 140	SDHC	
# Panasonic Lumix DMC-FT10	66	70	66	67	45	69	67	14	35 - 140	SDHC	
# Pentax X90	66	76	53	83	53	68	59	12	26 - 676	SDHC	
Samsung WB650	66	68	61	73	63	73	62	12	24 - 360	SDHC	
# Canon PowerShot D10	65	69	64	64	63	66	59	12	35 - 105	SDHC	
# Casio Exilim EX-Z800	65	69	65	68	41	72	63	14	27 - 108	SDHC	
# Nikon Coolpix S80	65	74	53	64	61	73	65	14	35 - 175	SDHC	
# Nikon Coolpix S1100pj	65	75	56	68	51	65	64	14	28 - 140	SDHC	
Olympus SP-800UZ	65	69	55	73	56	83	63	14	28 - 840	SDHC	
# Sony Cyber-shot DSC-WX5	65	67	63	68	58	54	72	12	24 - 120	SDHC, MS-D	
Canon Digital Ixus 105	64	63	66	66	54	72	63	12	28 - 112	SDHC	
Canon PowerShot A3100 IS	64	62	66	68	51	67	73	12	35 - 140	SDHC	
# Nikon Coolpix S5100	64	69	61	67	51	61	63	12	28 - 140	SDHC	
Sony Cyber-shot DSC-TX5	64	66	62	70	47	56	80	10	25 - 100	SDHC, MS-D	

	Battery must be charged in camera	Monitor size (mm)	Shutter delay (1m/10m, secs)	Startup time (secs)	Delay - sequential shots (secs, single mode)	Delay - sequential shots (secs, continuous mode)	ISO range	Video resolution (pixels)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Weight (g)	Price (\$)
stom	Yes	60 x 44	0.2 / 0.2	2.2	2.2	0.1	160 - 3200	1920 x 1080	11.5 x 8.5 x 11	513	519
stom	No	54 x 40	0.3 / 0.3	3.1	3.2	0.7	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	12.5 x 9.5 x 11.5	648	649
stom	Yes	60 x 45	0.1 / 0.6	2.2	1.8	0.5	160 - 3200	1920 x 1080	11 x 6.5 x 3.5	206	399
stom	No	54 x 40	0.4 / 0.3	2.5	2.1	0.4	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	210	499
stom	No	66 x 37	0.8 / 0.7	3.1	2.7	0.4	125 - 3200	1280 x 720	10 x 5.5 x 2.4	175	499
stom	No	60 x 45	0.5 / 0.5	3.1	3.0	1.0	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	11.5 x 7.5 x 5	321	329
stom	No	62 x 41	0.4 / 0.2	3.1	0.9	0.1	100 - 1600	1920 x 1080	10.5 x 6 x 2.5	180	599
stom	No	54 x 40	0.2 / 0.2	2.7	2.5	1.9	64 - 3200	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 3	173	300
stom	No	60 x 45	0.4 / 0.3	2.3	2.6	0.5	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	219	799
stom	No	60 x 45	0.4 / 0.3	2.3	2.6	0.5	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 3.5	219	599
stom	No	76 x 43	0.3 / 0.3	2.6	3.5	1.2	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 2.2	163	399
stom	No	54 x 40	0.3 / 0.2	2.6	2.3	0.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 3	159	299
stom	No	62 x 42	0.7 / 0.7	3.1	2.0	0.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 3	162	349
stom	No	76 x 43	0.4 / 0.3	2.2	2.1	0.1	125 - 3200	1920 x 1080	10 x 6 x 1.8	151	499
stom	No	54 x 40	0.4 / 0.4	2.2	3.2	1.2	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	9.5 x 6 x 1.8	135	319
stom	No	66 x 37	0.6 / 0.5	4.2	2.4	0.4	125 - 3200	1920 x 1080	10.5 x 6.5 x 2.5	191	549
stom	No	60 x 45	0.2 / 0.1	3.3	3.0	na	80 - 3200	1280 x 720	10.5 x 7 x 3	214	449
stom	No	54 x 40	0.7 / 0.5	3.1	2.9	0.8	100 - 1600	1280 x 720	11 x 7.5 x 8	478	299
stom	No	54 x 40	0.4 / 0.3	2.1	2.5	0.8	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 2.4	147	199
stom	No	63 x 41	0.2 / 0.2	2.3	2.4	0.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6.5 x 1.9	143	249
stom	No	54 x 40	0.2 / 0.2	2.7	2.1	0.4	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 2.5	191	499
stom	No	62 x 41	0.3 / 0.2	3.1	1.9	0.5	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6 x 2.4	168	499
stom	No	60 x 45	0.5 / 0.2	2.9	2.1	0.1	125 - 3200	1920 x 1080	10.5 x 6.5 x 3	204	429
stom	No	66 x 37	0.3 / 0.3	2.9	2.8	1.2	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	11 x 6.5 x 3.5	216	499
stom	No	54 x 40	0.3 / 0.3	2.6	2.3	0.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 2.4	149	249
stom	No	54 x 40	0.2 / 0.2	2.7	2.3	0.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 2.3	173	299
stom	No	54 x 40	1.1 / 0.6	3.6	3.3	0.2	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	11.5 x 8.5 x 11.5	470	399
stom	Yes	61 x 46	0.7 / 0.7	2.7	2.7	1.2	80 - 3200	1280 x 720	11 x 6.5 x 3.5	240	399
stom	No	50 x 37	0.5 / 0.5	1.7	2.3	0.8	80 - 1600	640 x 480	11 x 7 x 5	222	599
stom	No	54 x 40	0.2 / 0.2	2.7	2.4	na	50 - 3200	1280 x 720	9.5 x 5.5 x 2	122	259
stom	Yes	76 x 43	0.1 / 0.1	4.2	3.8	2.6	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 6.5 x 1.8	132	499
stom	No	60 x 45	0.3 / 0.2	3.7	3.1	2.3	80 - 1600	1280 x 720	10.5 x 7 x 2.5	181	369
stom	Yes	65 x 37	0.5 / 0.2	3.6	3.1	1.2	64 - 6400	1280 x 720	11 x 7.5 x 9	444	399
stom	No	56 x 42	0.4 / 0.3	2.6	2.0	0.1	125 - 3200	1920 x 1080	9.5 x 5.5 x 2.2	146	349
stom	No	54 x 40	0.3 / 0.4	2.1	3.1	1.0	80 - 1600	640 x 480	9.5 x 6 x 2.1	139	219
stom	No	54 x 40	0.3 / 0.2	2.8	2.5	1.1	80 - 1600	640 x 480	10 x 6 x 3	156	149
stom	Yes	54 x 40	0.1 / 0.2	3.1	2.8	1.1	100 - 3200	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 2.2	133	249
stom	No	66 x 37	0.3 / 0.2	2.2	1.9	0.1	125 - 3200	1280 x 720	10 x 6 x 1.9	146	399

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of: Image quality: 35%; Ease of use: 25%; Versatility: 10%; Monitor / viewfinder: 10%; Flash: 10%; Movie: 10%. **Resolution** This calculation is based on the maximum number of pixels the camera uses to create an image. **Zoom range** indicates a range comparable to a 35mm film-based camera. **Memory type SDHC**: Secure Digital High Capacity card is an extension of the SD card format with a larger capacity up to 32GB, and looks exactly the same as an SD card. **MS-Duo**: Memory Stick Duo. **Battery type** Most custom batteries are rechargeable Li-ion or Lithium polymer (Li-po). None of the cameras that take custom batteries can also use normal alkaline batteries. Those specifying AA can use alkaline, lithium or rechargeable batteries. **Monitor size** The viewable area. **Shutter delay** The time it takes from the moment the shutter button is pressed to the moment the picture is taken. A time is included to indicate the delay when focusing on a subject at close (1m) or medium range (10m). **Startup time** The time delay between turning on the camera and being ready to take a photo. **Delay - sequential shots (single mode)** The time between shots when the camera is in single shot mode. **Delay - sequential shots (continuous mode)** The time between shots when the camera is in continuous shot mode. **ISO range** Light sensitivity equivalent to 35mm film. **Video resolution** Highest detail format available; many cameras will have a number of smaller formats as well. **Dimensions** Exterior, when the camera is switched off. **Weight** Includes batteries, memory cards and neck strap if supplied. **Price** Recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in February 2011. **TABLE NOTES** Newly tested model. **na** Not applicable.



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Bold type indicates a product test, member survey or user trial report. Normal type indicates a CHOICE research report. * Indicates an update, addition or correction.

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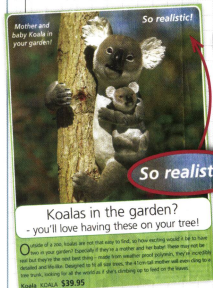
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HARD WORD

The winner of this month's best entry goes to T Sudholz, who's glad he isn't a baby koala. Thanks also to D Shaw, A Soligo, M Watts, R Murray, A Wydefeld, U Fisher and N Holmes for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. If you have any examples you think should be shared with other CHOICE members, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

REALISTIC IN WHAT SENSE? AND TO WHOM?

13-year-old Tyler certainly wasn't fooled – but it was the mother's stranglehold grip on the baby that really did it for him.



SHOULD WE BE WORRIED?

Apparently these shrimp aren't good enough for fish and other aquatic animals. Or is it that they're too good?

FROZEN BLACK TIGER SHRIMP IQF
SEA EAGLE

SIZE: PM 31/35
WEIGHT: 0.85 KG

FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION ONLY-NOT TO BE USED AS BAIT OR FEED FOR AQUATIC ANIMAL

MUST BE COOKED BEFORE CONSUMPTION
BEST BEFORE : 23.05.2012
KEEP FROZEN AT OR BELOW -18 °C

TIME TO CLEAN UP?

Looks like the NRL is promoting having a good clean time!



Care Instructions

Wash before use
Not suitable for dishwasher
Hand wash only



By all accounts, pizza wasn't even invented until well after this.



IS THE BISCUIT 12.5% FULL OF OATS?

Or 87.5% empty of oats? We reckon you'd have to be quite the optimist to say it's full of rolled oats.

SAFE?

Or not safe? Depends whether you read the front or the back.



ORIGINAL

NUTRITION INFORMATION

When original pericakins are prepared according to standard pack directions.
 Servings per Package: 5 servings
 Serving Size: 125g (3.5 oz) (1 packet)

	AVG QTY PER-SERVING (275 Cal)	AVG QTY PER 100g (203 Cal)
ENERGY	1150KJ	850KJ
PROTEIN	8.1g	4.5g
FAT - TOTAL	2.3g	1.7g
- SATURATED	Less than 1g	Less than 1g
CARBOHYDRATE	56.4g	41.8g
- SUGARS	21.9g	16.2g
SODIUM	485mg	360mg

Green's General Foods Pty Ltd
29 Glenferrie Road,
Glenferrie
NSW 2761 Australia
Customer Service
1800 800 805

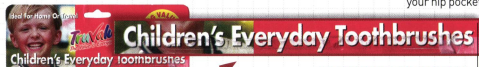


RECYCLABLE
PACKAGING



CHEWING THE FAT

Given you get less product for the same price as the "original", and the suggested serving size is bigger, the only thing low fat about the "low-fat" version of this pancake mix will be your hip pocket.



**AS OPPOSED TO SPECIAL
OCCASION TOOTHBRUSHES?**